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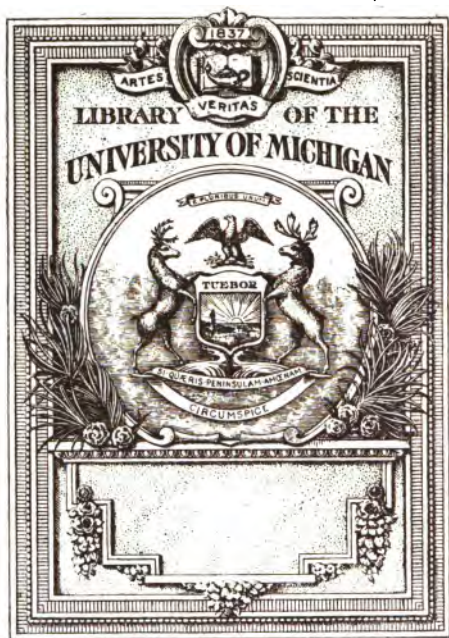
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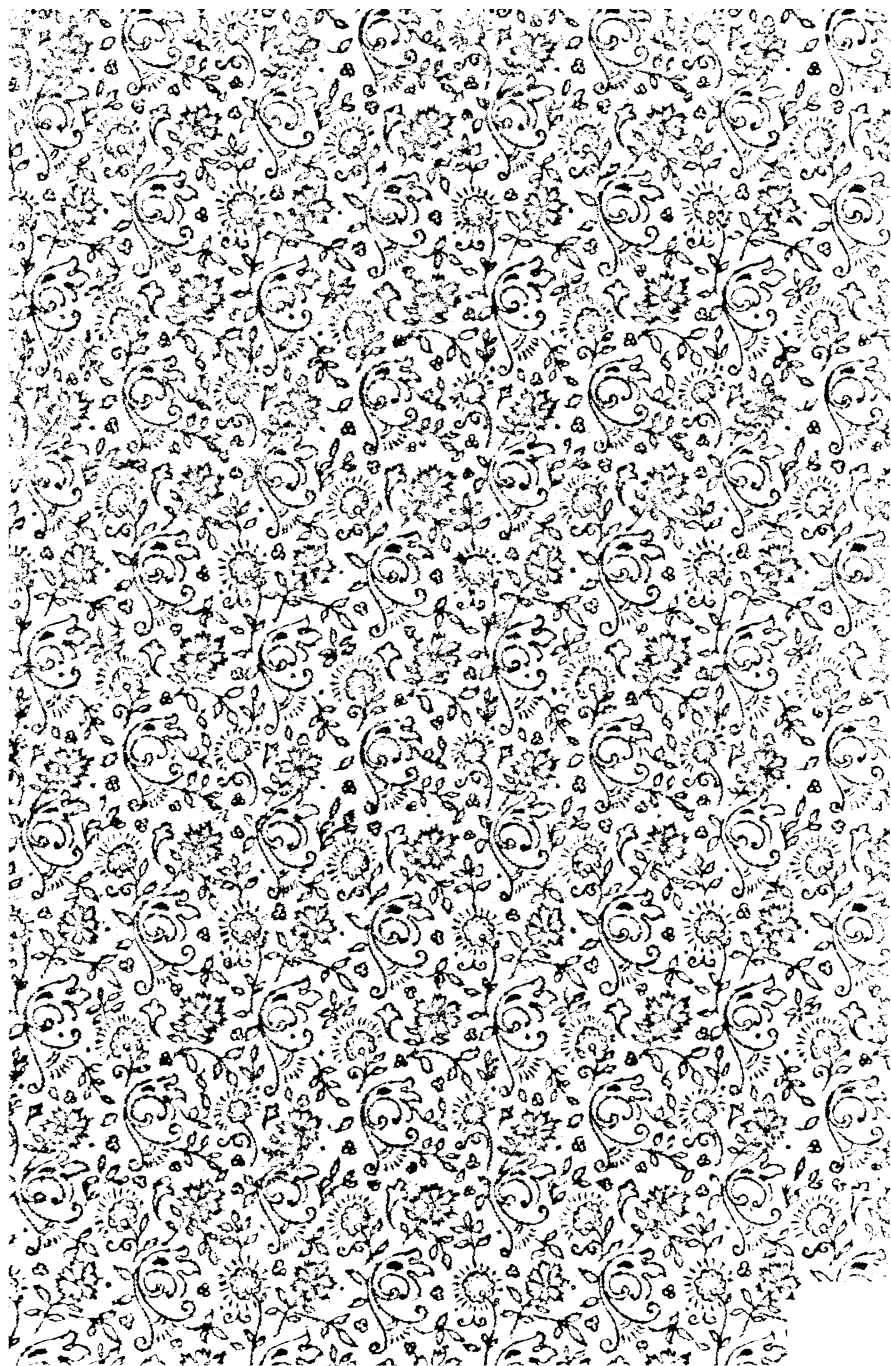
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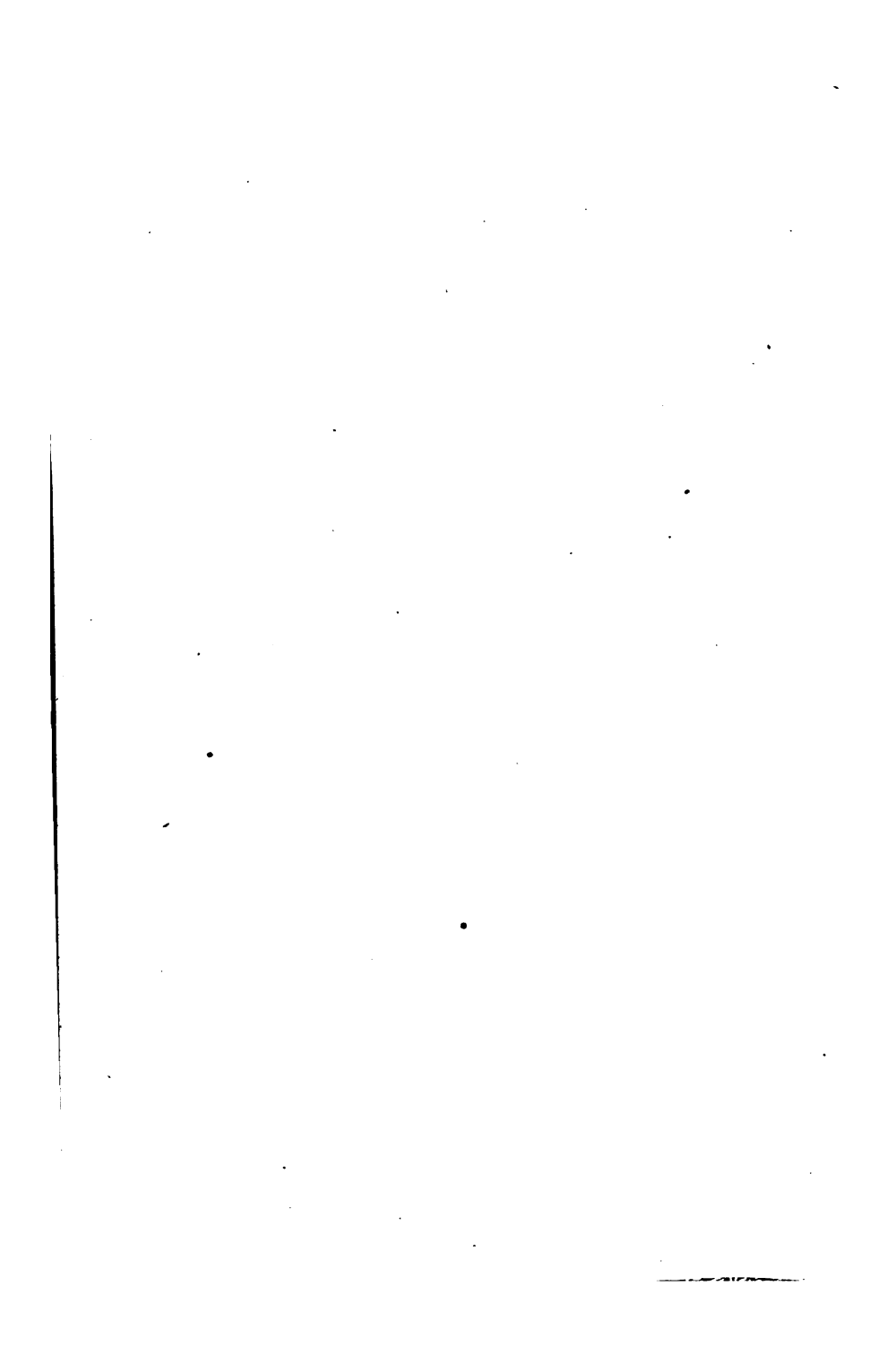
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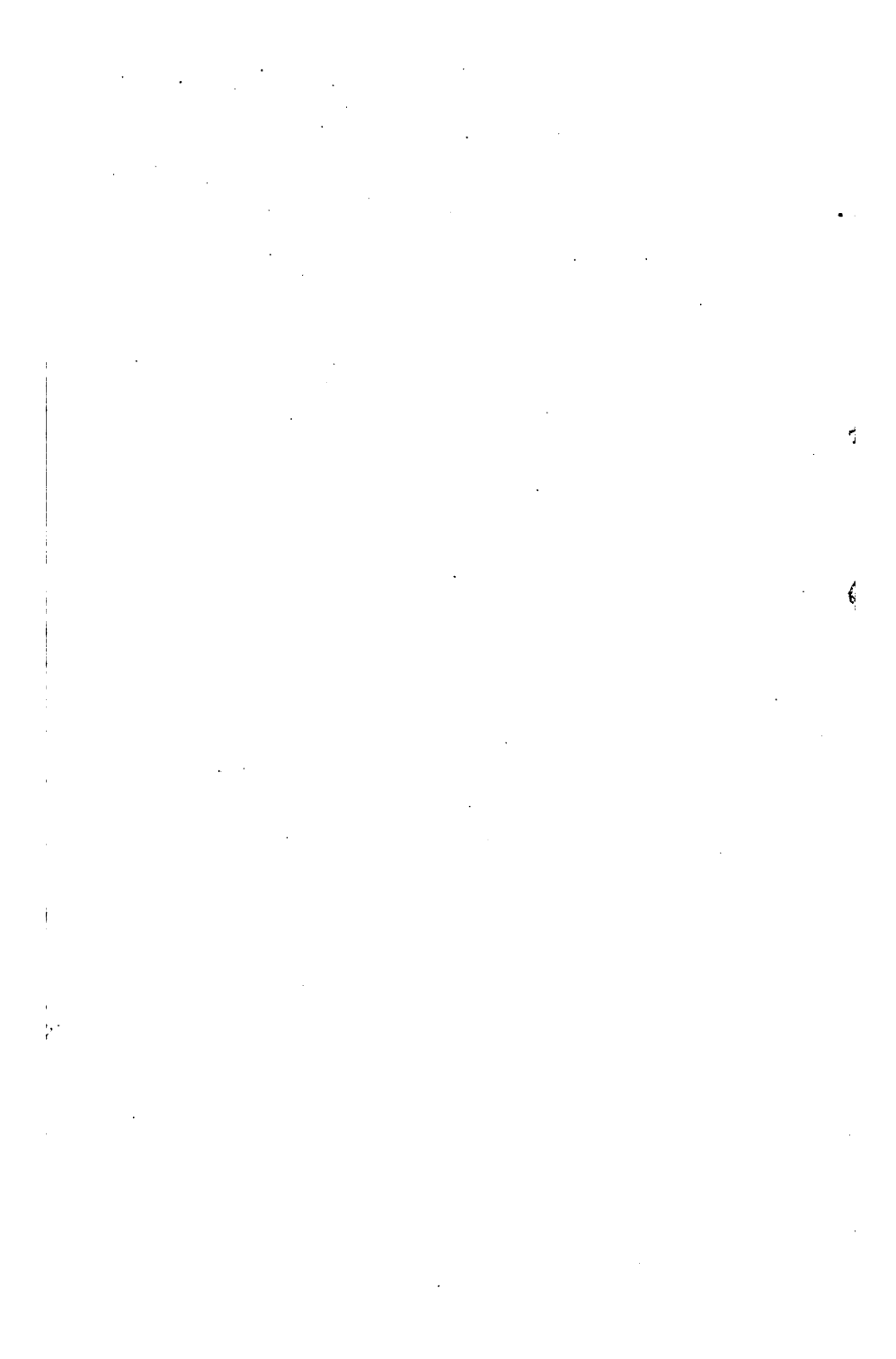


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HER WILFUL WAY

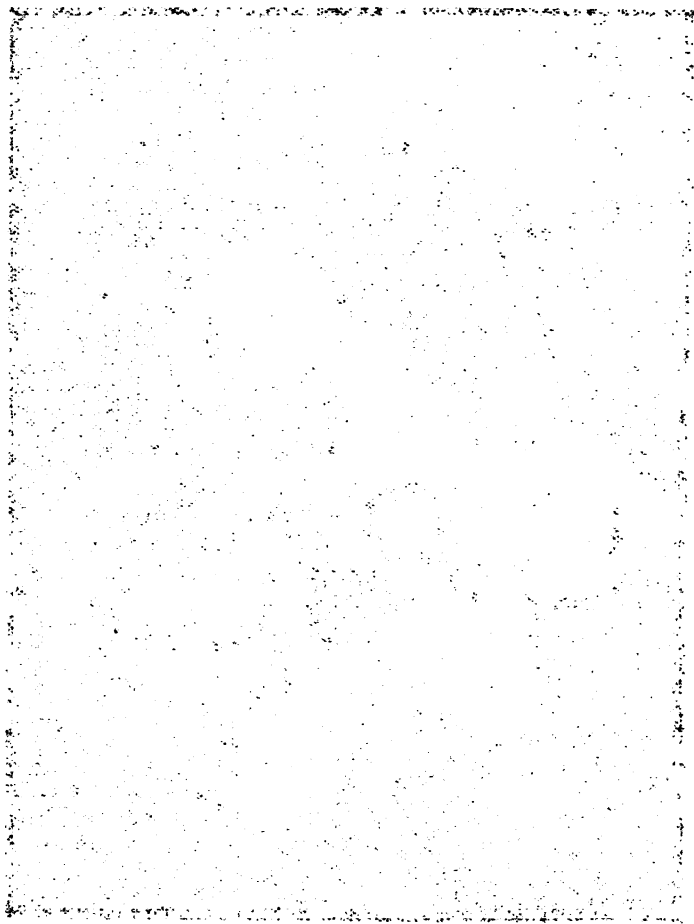
A STORY FOR GIRLS

BY HELEN
SHERMAN
GRIFFITH

Illustrated by
IDA WAUGH

The Penn Publishing Company

PHILADELPHIA MCMII



HER WILFUL WAY

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Her Wilful Way

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CONTENTS

| CHAPTER | PAGE |
|--|------|
| I A Runaway..... | 1 |
| II In the Library..... | 13 |
| III A Morning's Incidents | 27 |
| IV The Reading Class..... | 41 |
| V The Merchant of Venice..... | 55 |
| VI Bad News for Lucile..... | 68 |
| VII Getting Acquainted..... | 83 |
| VIII A Bad Scrape..... | 93 |
| IX Home for the Holidays | 111 |
| X Her Father's Wedding..... | 125 |
| XI A Night Adventure..... | 137 |
| XII Little Things | 150 |
| XIII Lost Money..... | 162 |
| XIV Burglars..... | 174 |
| XV The Birthday Feast and the S.P.S.S.G..... | 188 |
| XVI In Miss Hobart's Room..... | 201 |
| XVII A Reception at the White House..... | 213 |
| XVIII Ellen's Secret..... | 227 |
| XIX Mabel Goring..... | 236 |

| CHAPTER | PAGE |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| XX Miss Jones as a Confidant..... | 250 |
| XXI Mabel Leaves School..... | 261 |
| XXII Mrs. Wentworth..... | 273 |
| XXIII The Picnic. | 284 |
| XXIV A Supper Party..... | 299 |
| XXV Typhoid Fever..... | 319 |
| XXVI An Accident..... | 331 |
| XXVII Conclusion..... | 345 |

HER WILFUL WAY

CHAPTER I

A RUNAWAY

"BUT, Miss Jones, after I've planned it all and invited Edith to go and everything, I can't give it up. Please don't go and spoil everything!" pleaded the girl. There was a suggestion of tears in her vexed tone.

"But I really must insist," protested the governess. "You know that your father has never allowed you to drive Rubble unless an older person is with you."

"Oh rubbish," interrupted the girl, more rudely than she intended. "That was 'way last year when I was ever so much younger and more—more irresponsible. As if a father can't trust his daughter when she is fifteen years old!" and she lifted her head proudly, her self-satisfaction strengthened by the use of the big word.

"And now that he is away I feel it my duty to do as I know he would do if he were at home,"

finished Miss Jones, compressing her lips and quietly ignoring the interruption.

Lucile went on with her preparations for going out. Her feeling of irritation at what she was pleased to consider Miss Jones' unnecessary interference, increased with every moment.

"I am quite old enough to take care of myself," she said hotly, pinning her sailor hat firmly to her head. "And I'm not going to have the girls think I'm a coward or a big baby. Father treats me enough like one as it is," she added to herself rebelliously, "without having that old thing poking herself in."

Miss Jones rose from her chair as Lucile displayed a final determination to have her own way, by rummaging in the top drawer for her driving gloves. She was about to utter one more protest when Lucile, glancing out of the window, exclaimed :

"There's Rubble at the door, now. I really must hurry, Miss Jones."

"But at least take James with you."

The girl made a grimace.

"We don't want any horrid servant listening to our talk," she said. "Besides," she added, calling over her shoulder from the door, "it's the phaeton and there isn't any place for a groom,"

and she ran down-stairs, hastily pulling on her gloves.

Miss Jones sighed and returned to her own room. It was no easy task, hers, the charge of this motherless, undisciplined girl, alternately scolded and spoiled by a careless young father. The governess paused at an upper hall window to watch Lucile's departure. The warm, fragrant breath of summer came in through the open casement and the crunch of wheels on the gravel driveway was distinctly audible. Miss Jones watched the phaeton until it had turned out of the gate and was out of sight around a curve of the street. Rubble certainly did appear to be going along placidly enough, but nevertheless she felt anxious. She knew that had Mr. Wentworth been at home, he would either have forbidden the drive altogether or would have made some such arrangement as would have provided the presence of an older person. Not that Rubble was a vicious horse, but he was full of spirit and required his driver's constant, careful attention, something which Miss Jones felt sure he would not receive from Lucile.

But Lucile had no such apprehensions. Not in the least afraid of the horse and quite confident of her own powers to control him, she was

purely jubilant in anticipation of her morning's excursion.

"Drive him a bit easy-like at first, miss," advised the groom who stood at the horse's head before the door. "And don't tease him too much with the bit, fer he's a tender mouth and won't bear jerkin'. And please to remember, miss, that he does hate to have things as rattle come up behind him."

Even the coachman felt a trifle of concern at the expedition. Lucile had never been trusted with Rubble alone, but her own horse had gone suddenly lame.

"Oh, James," laughed the girl, jumping into the carriage and taking the reins. "You talk as if I'd never driven before. I never jerk the lines, and I'll remember about the rattling, but I can't put out a sign forbidding rattling wagons from coming near, can I?" and with a lively "get up, Rubble, old boy," she started off.

Edith Wharton, who lived but a short distance away, was ready and waiting when Lucile drew up in front of the house and the tuneful whistle affected as a signal by the girls of their "set," brought her flying out with a gay, "Hello, what made you so late?"

"I don't think I am late," replied Lucile, lay-

ing the linen lap-robe across her friend's knees. "Your clocks must be fast. But I did think I'd never get ready. Miss Jones nagged me the whole time. She didn't want me to come."

"Why not?" asked Edith indignantly. "It seems to me she's always trying to interfere with your pleasure, Lucile."

"Oh, she means well," answered Lucile carelessly, her recent irritation already forgotten. "Her conscience is too touchy, that's all. She thinks she has the charge of me when father's away. You see my own horse is lame. He's got a crack or something in his hoof, James says, and I can't drive him until father gets home and sees about it. And Miss Jones didn't want me to drive Rubble."

"I thought it didn't look like Billy," commented Edith. "Why didn't Miss Jones want you to drive him? Isn't he—isn't he safe?" There was a suspicion of nervousness in her voice.

"Oh, safe enough," declared Lucile. "Only, you see, I'd never done it before and Miss Jones was fidgety, that's all. Now let's stop at Benson's for some soda water and then we'll go out into the country. I'll get a pound of caramels to take along."

The purchases made, the girls turned off from the main street of the town, and drove along a broad, attractive avenue, with large handsome residences on either side; a short distance brought them to the park through which Lucile drove at a brisk trot. The gate at the farther side opened upon a narrow, shady country road, winding up and down through the hilly farm lands.

"Now," said Lucile, slacking the reins as Rubble dropped into a walk up a long, gently sloping hill. "Let's open the box and have a caramel; I'm dying for one. And then we'll get to work. Did you bring a paper and pencil?"

"Yes." And Edith promptly produced the desired articles from her pocket. "And I made out a little list of eatables last night," she added. "I saw Nan yesterday and she said she'd bring a chocolate cake."

"How lovely! Did you put me down for sandwiches? Miss Jones makes such delicious ones."

"Yes," replied Edith, referring to her list, "I have you down for sandwiches and—oh, yes, and olives."

"That's all right," assented Lucile, clasping Rubble's reins carelessly between her knees while

she removed the oiled-paper wrapper from a caramel, "and what are you going to take?"

The subject under discussion was a prospective picnic, and a most absorbing topic did it prove to be. So interested did the girls become that they did not notice how far they had gone until the hot noon sun pouring on their faces made them realize the lateness of the hour.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Lucile, turning the horse. "I had no idea we'd come so far. We won't get home in time for luncheon. Miss Jones will think we've been run away with, surely."

"And I promised mamma I'd be home by twelve to do my practising," said Edith, smitten with remorse. "She'll be awfully worried."

"Never mind. I'll drive back fast and you can practise fifteen minutes more to make up, afterward. That's the way I mollify Miss Jones when she's cross."

"Oh, it isn't so much the practising. I don't really have to do that in vacation, you know. I only do it to keep my hands from getting stiffened up and forgetting my exercises. But I always try to keep my promises to mama."

"Why, what an energetic person!" ejaculated Lucile. "To practise of your own free will!"

I'd never touch a piano from year's end to year's end if I wasn't driven to it."

"Well, to tell the truth, I don't believe I should, either," admitted Edith, "if it weren't for Gladys Hurst. She always knows her lesson perfectly. She comes just before me, you know, and when I bungle, the professor begins to harp on her praises, until I get so sick of having her held up as a model that I try to do better, just in self-defense."

Lucile laughed.

"I know. Miss Hamilton used to do that—the girls whom she taught before she came to me 'never let their wrists drop, or drummed; they were quite too conscientious and eager to learn,'" she finished, primming her mouth and speaking in a mincing tone, so cleverly imitating a former governess that Edith fairly shouted with laughter.

They had been proceeding at a quick trot. Lucile, in her anxiety to reach home before Miss Jones should become really alarmed at the length of her absence, had urged Rubble forward and he, with the prospect of a cooling bucket of water and generous ration of oats, was nothing loth to get back to his comfortable stall. Moreover, his spirit was chafing under the annoying persecution of the flies during his former slow

gait. They were going faster than either of the girls realized. The town was nearly reached as was evidenced by frequent straggling blocks of houses and long stretches of paved streets—so familiar to “improved property” in the suburban districts. Their way lay down one of these new streets which sloped steeply. It was freshly paved with brick, which shone, red and hot and smooth in the sunshine, and was flanked by rows of houses, for the most part blankly empty.

Seeing the steep slope, Lucile tightened the reins to take it at a slower pace, but Rubble, giving his head a little toss, went ahead at a gait which seemed to Lucile to quicken rather than to moderate.

“Oh, Lucile,” cried Edith nervously, “do make him go slower down this hill. Brick is so slippery ; he might stumble.”

Lucile braced her feet, wound the reins about her hands and pulled sturdily. But Rubble did not obey the signal to stop.

“Lucile, Lucile, do stop him ! Is he running away ?” gasped Edith.

“I—I’m afraid I can’t stop him, Edie,” said Lucile in a low voice. “Don’t touch the reins. Take away your hands,” she added sharply, as Edith reached out excitedly.

The phaeton rattled down the street and people began to gather on the sidewalks, to make remarks or to shout advice. Lucile was resting against the extreme edge of the seat, her aching arms strained to the utmost as she endeavored to regain control of the running horse. Just then a delivery wagon came rattling down a side street, Rubble shied and gave a forward dash; he had taken the bit between his teeth.

"Oh, that man! Wave to him to stop his wagon, Edith," exclaimed Lucile now thoroughly frightened.

Edith, thankful to have something to do, turned, and kneeling on the seat, screamed and shouted frantically to the man behind. But he, deafened by the rattle of wheels on the brick pavement and thinking that she was beseeching him for help, only urged on his own horse the faster.

Lucile, though very uncertain as to the outcome of this mad rush, and recollecting with a shiver the railroad crossing ahead, did not lose her presence of mind. She still clung firmly to the reins, and tried to "saw" the horse into submission. Then she remembered a tale that the coachman had once told her of a runaway in which he had figured as hero, when he had



SHE DIRECTED THE RAISING OF THE HORSE



stopped the horses by throwing them. If only she could throw Rubble!

They had reached the bottom of the hill now and the street was more crowded. Other vehicles pulled aside to avoid the runaway, and people ran out into the street, waving their arms and shouting or trying to catch the bridle of the terrified animal. Lucile still clung to the reins, Edith sitting white and mute beside her. It flashed across Lucile's mind that possibly the poor girl had fainted, but she did not dare turn her head to see. She still had sufficient control over Rubble to keep him in a moderately straight course. Just ahead of them was a wide sloping space between the curbs, where a private driveway joined the street; Lucile resolved to try her scheme of throwing the horse there.

"If only we don't get by it too fast," she murmured in a panic of nervousness. "It will be so hard to know just the right moment!"

They sped on, Lucile's eyes now fixed on the gateway. When they were nearly opposite it she, more by instinct than judgment, dropped the left rein and threw all her strength violently upon the right. Rubble, astonished and bewildered by the suddenly relaxed tension on one

side of his bleeding mouth, obeyed from habit the sharp summons upon the other.

"Hold on for your life, Edie," gasped Lucile, "or you'll get spilled."

There was a quick turn, a lunge and a snort, accompanied by the sharp snapping of a shaft and Rubble was down. There were at once a score of eager volunteers to hold the fallen animal, and a dozen more to help out the girls, numb and faint with fright.

Edith, when it was all over, sat down on the curbstone and burst into tears. Lucile, however, too proud to betray her feelings, superintended the unharnessing and raising of Rubble, and made arrangements with two men to take home the horse and to drag the broken phaeton to the nearest repair shop. Then she bent over Edith and shook her slightly.

"Get up, Edie, dear," she whispered gently. "Don't cry like that. It makes everybody stare so. Come, it's all right now and we're going home on the trolley."

CHAPTER II

IN THE LIBRARY

LUCILE was startled by a low knock on the door. She was lying on the couch in her own room, clad in a loose wrapper and trying to forget the events of the morning in an absorbing story.

She had gone home with Edith after the runaway and had apologized to Mrs. Wharton for the risk to which she had exposed Edith. But Mrs. Wharton had received her advances coldly, terror for Edith blinding her to everything except Lucile's wilfulness in taking out the horse against her governess's commands. This reception of her sincere repentance had roused Lucile's indignation and she resolved to humble herself no farther. Upon arriving home, she gave Miss Jones a very cursory report of the affair, and though the self-reproaches with which Miss Jones received the news made Lucile still more ashamed of her thoughtless act of daring, she said nothing, but marched away, carelessly hum-

ming a tune, as though a runaway were a common occurrence.

Miss Jones, more hurt than she could say, went away to have a cry in her own room. She had grown fond of her pupil during the few months of her residence in the house and longed to win her good-will. She was sorry for the girl's neglected life, guessing at the warm heart that lay beneath this cold, unapproachable exterior. The truth was, Lucile was craving for love and sympathy. Her mother had died in the girl's early childhood, and her father, too young a man for the care of this great girl, was absorbed in his business, and, though he doubtless loved his daughter, failed to show her his affection, save for an occasional careless caress, and an indulgence far too great to be healthy. But when discipline was required, and Lucile, owing to her high spirits and strong will, was often in trouble, Mr. Wentworth was severe, harsh and often unjust in his punishment. Many a time his daughter would go to him, her heart aching and full of shame and repentance, ready to throw herself into his arms, acknowledge herself wrong and receive his tender rebuke and forgiveness. But her loving impulse would be checked by the frown on her father's brow, the cold tone of his

voice, and she would shrink back into her shell of defiance and indifference.

Miss Jones had noticed all this, and longed to reach the girl's heart, but Lucile, fearing further restraint, misjudged her good-will and resented her authority. But this morning had been the first time that Lucile had really acted in direct opposition to her governess's wish, and she was now suffering the consequences of her disobedience, though too proud to own herself in the wrong.

She responded to the knock very crossly, for she had asked not to be disturbed and she thought it was Miss Jones, come to deliver another lecture. But it was the maid's voice that spoke, saying as she opened the door:

"Miss Lucile, your father wishes to speak to you in the library."

"My father! Goodness!" ejaculated the girl, springing from the couch and beginning to dress hastily. "Whenever in the world did he come home, Katy?"

"Just now, miss."

"I suppose Miss Jones has told him about this morning."

"It was James, miss. He didn't go to tell on you," she hastened to add. "But he was comin'

home from seein' about the buggy, just as yer father was comin' up on the porch, 'n' your father, he had to know where James had been."

"Oh, dear, why couldn't he have stayed away as long as he said he was going to," grumbled Lucile as she tied the long brown braids. "He'll scold awfully, I suppose."

Taken thus by surprise all her regrets vanished and she ran down to the library in anything but a repentant frame of mind. But James, fresh from hearing his little mistress's praises sung by those who had watched her bravery in the morning, had given such a glowing account of the adventure to Mr. Wentworth that he quite forgot her wrong-doing in his pride.

"Well, what's this James has been telling me?" he said as Lucile entered. His voice had not the stern, cold tone that she had expected, but the words were unfortunately chosen.

"I suppose he's been telling on me," she replied coolly, though her heart was beating hard.

"Not telling on you," said her father, "but of how brave you were this morning."

"Oh!" exclaimed Lucile with an astonished little gasp.

"You threw Rubble, I understand?"

"Yes, I did. But it didn't hurt him a bit,

father and the——” Lucile was beginning hastily.

“But it might have hurt you—and your little friend,” interrupted her father, gravely. “Do you think it was right to risk both your lives for a mere whim?”

“It wasn’t a whim, father,” replied Lucile a trifle sullenly. “I had invited Edith Wharton to go driving with me and James came in this morning to say that Billy had a crack in his foot, and couldn’t be used, so I had to take Rubble.”

“Didn’t you know that I never allow you to take Rubble out unless some one is with you?”

“You never forbade me,” she said defiantly.

Her father frowned.

“No,” he said sharply. “Neither have I ever forbidden you to shoot my revolver, but I feel sure that your common sense would prevent your doing any such foolish thing.”

“My common sense doesn’t show me what that has to do with driving Rubble,” replied Lucile pertly.

She repented the rude speech the moment it was made, but was afraid to say so, and bit her lip to keep back the angry, ashamed tears.

Mr. Wentworth regarded her coldly for a moment. Then he said :

"Nor does your common sense seem to have taught you respect to your elders. You may go to your own room until you can address me properly."

Lucile rose, took a step toward the door, hesitated and then turned back to where her father sat.

"I—I'm sorry I was rude," she said stiffly.

"I am glad to hear you say so," he responded in a relieved tone. "When you came in, Lucile, I intended to praise your brave act in preventing a more serious accident this morning. But your manner checked the expression of any such feelings. I have now only to say that you did very wrong, in taking out the horse alone in my absence, and as a punishment, I forbid you to drive any more this summer."

"Not drive any more this summer! Oh, father!" cried Lucile.

"Of course you may have the carriage whenever you wish it, with James to drive. But Billy must be sent to pasture for a couple of months at least, for his foot, and I feel sure that your experience of this morning will be sufficient warning to you not to take out Rubble again."

"Yes, sir," was all the answer that Lucile gave, but she rushed from the room to hide the

torrent of tears that she could no longer suppress. It was a bitter disappointment to be thus deprived of her favorite amusement. It was too severe a punishment, she told herself as she rushed upstairs headlong. In the upper hall she met Miss Jones.

"Why, Lucile," cried her governess in distress at sight of the red, angry face, "what is it? What has happened?"

She caught at the girl's dress to detain her.

Lucile wrenched her dress away impatiently. The movement twisted Miss Jones' wrist severely, causing her to drop the skirt with a cry of pain.

"Oh, oh, what have I done," cried Lucile in quick repentance, frightened at her pale face. "Here, come in here and sit down till you feel better. Oh, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to do it. Oh, dear."

She helped Miss Jones into her own room, and insisted that she lie down on the couch while she bathed the swelling wrist with cold water. Miss Jones submitted unwillingly, though the wrench was a severe one.

"There," said Lucile after a while. "I'll just bandage it up with witch hazel, and I think it will be better soon."

She laid a piece of linen, soaked in the cool-

ing stuff on the throbbing forearm and bandaged it with gentle, deft fingers.

"You ought to be a nurse; you have such a knack for it," declared Miss Jones admiringly. "What a neat bandage it is."

"Is it really?" asked Lucile, surveying her work critically. "But I am so sorry I hurt you," she added mournfully. "It's just this dreadful temper of mine that gets me into such a lot of trouble. I was ashamed to let you see me crying, and I jerked my dress away so that I could run into my room to hide, and now I've gone and hurt you, goodness knows how badly. They say sprains are dreadful things to get well," and the tears sprang to her eyes.

"But it's my left wrist," replied Miss Jones cheerfully, "so it won't be so bad."

"So it is!" exclaimed Lucile, somewhat comforted by the discovery. "And I'll do all I can to help you until it gets well, I will honestly. And, Miss Jones," she added after a pause, "I'm sorry too, about this morning. I—I—it seems to me that whatever I do is wrong," she broke off impatiently.

"Not everything, Lucile; spending half your allowance to keep poor Mrs. Smith supplied with ice while Johnny was ill isn't wrong."

"Oh, how did you know about that!" cried the girl flushing.

"A little bird whispered it."

"I believe you were doing things for them, yourself," exclaimed Lucile, eying her governess closely. "Of course you have. It was you who put up those curtains and—and got her to clean up and all that. I never would have known how to do that."

"The curtains may have made Johnnie's home more cheerful, but it was your ice and the fruit that saved his life," said Miss Jones soberly.

"Oh, do you really think so?" asked Lucile delighted. "I like to think that maybe I had helped to save somebody's life. But, oh dear, I might have killed somebody, too. Father says I risked Edith's life this morning," she said with a little shudder.

"I hope it was not so bad as that, dear, or I should never forgive my weakness in allowing you to go."

"You didn't allow me—I just went," interposed Lucile, resolved to drink her cup of repentance to the dregs. "And I was ashamed to let you take the blame of it upon yourself, but after I came home from Mrs Wharton's, I was so angry at the way she had acted when I tried to tell her

how sorry I was that—well, I just didn't seem to care somehow. If I only had some one to tell me when not to do things, in the right way."

"I try to do it in the right way, Lucile."

Lucile flushed hotly. She had been thinking of her father when she spoke.

"I meant—I wasn't thinking of—oh dear me, I've gone and been rude to you again!"

"Never mind," said Miss Jones, pressing her hand kindly. "Let's not talk any more about it. But Lucile," she added after a pause, "I do wish I could make you learn to like me. I want you to understand that although I am put over you to teach, and to rule you in a certain manner, I want to be friends with you too. I wish very much you would let me love you and help you."

"O Miss Jones, I do need somebody awfully, that I can tell things to. It seems to me that all my life, ever since mamma died, people have just been scolding me and interfering with my good times, simply because they had the right to say what I should and should not do. I always detested my teachers and I thought you were going to be just like the rest."

"And you didn't care to take the trouble to

find out my true character?" asked Miss Jones smiling, as she rose to go.

"Oh, I am quite all right now," she replied in answer to Lucile's anxious inquiries, "and can manage my dressing quite easily by myself. It is nearly dinner-time, you know," she added with a significant glance at the girl's crumpled frock.

There had been several wordy battles on this same question of tidiness at meal-times, but now Lucile jumped up quite cheerfully to perform the usually hated toilet.

Mr. Wentworth turned to his writing with a sigh when Lucile had left the library. He was conscious that something was wrong but could not see where the mistake lay. He blamed Lucile's hasty, ungovernable tongue, quite overlooking the fact that her quick temper and lack of self-control were the result of his own neglect.

That evening he called Miss Jones into the library, and after discussing one or two unimportant matters, said:

"I want to talk to you about Lucile, Miss Jones."

He stopped and seemed to have so much difficulty in finding words with which to continue that Miss Jones ventured to say:

"Is it about this morning? For I blame my-

self severely in not having been more firm in forbidding her to go."

"No, it is not about this morning; at least, not altogether," replied Mr. Wentworth slowly, and as though going over the words he spoke in his own mind, "though indeed, it is possible that I should have allowed the experiment, had I been at home, for I have great faith in the girl's cool-headedness. Since I have heard how splendidly she behaved this morning, I would not be afraid to let her drive Rubble at any time."

"Oh!" exclaimed Miss Jones with an involuntary little gasp, "I hope you won't."

"No," he replied, smiling. "I shall not, for I have punished Lucile by forbidding her to drive any more this summer."

"That will be a very great disappointment to her," remarked Miss Jones.

"I daresay. But it will teach her a lesson. But it is upon another matter that I wished to speak to you. I don't like this unlimited freedom that Lucile seems to indulge in during the summer-time. It isn't good for her. I think she should have some one regular duty at least; something to occupy a part of each day, to serve as a check on the lawlessness that a constant round of play threatens."

"It is just what I have been longing to do, Mr. Wentworth," exclaimed Miss Jones eagerly.

"I, too, think it is what Lucile needs."

"And what would you suggest?"

"I had in mind the formation of a reading class," she replied promptly. "I would propose that Lucile be allowed to invite two or three of her girl friends to meet here with her on certain days of the week to read aloud some interesting and instructive work, say Shakespeare, if you don't think Lucile too young. The girls could discuss what they read, being led to express their own opinions, thus learning to be observant and critical."

"Excellent, excellent," ejaculated Mr. Wentworth. "How quickly you have caught my idea. But evidently you had thought it all out before."

"Yes, I have wished for it all summer. I suggested reading aloud to Lucile once or twice, but she has always been busy or on the point of going out. However, if she is allowed to have her friends with her it will excite her interest, I am sure. You know anything like a club has great charms for a girl," she added rising.

"Just so, just so, and I will tell Lucile of the plan the first thing in the morning. Thank you

for solving my difficulty so quickly," he replied as he held open the door for her.

Miss Jones was well pleased with the new plan but would have preferred being allowed to tell Lucile of it herself, for since the incident of the afternoon she had great hopes of winning the girl's good-will and confidence. She was moreover afraid that Lucile would regard the proposition, coming thus from her father, as in some way a further punishment for her recent wilfulness.

CHAPTER III

A MORNING'S INCIDENT

MISS JONES was dressing to go out. She had a long list of shopping to accomplish and wished to get an early start in order to return before the heat of the day. As she passed the schoolroom on her way down-stairs her eye was caught by a mournful figure seated listlessly beside the open window.

"Why, Lucile!" exclaimed Miss Jones, stopping in surprise, for the girl was crying.

Lucile brushed the tears away hastily and sprang up.

"It's a lazy sort of day, isn't it," she said with assumed carelessness. "Oh, you're going out," she added, glancing at her governess's hat and gloves.

Miss Jones thought she detected a note of wistfulness in the girl's voice.

"Just to do some shopping," she said genially. "Would you like to go with me?"

"Oh, may I? Are you sure you want me? I won't be in the way?" cried Lucile eagerly. "I haven't a thing to do and was feeling awfully lonesome."

"I shall be glad to have company. Hurry and get ready."

It was but a question of moments for Lucile to tidy her hair and don her hat.

"I needn't wear these, need I?" she pleaded, displaying a pair of gloves. "It's so hot. I'll carry them in my hand."

It was not a long walk from the Wentworth house to the business part of the town. The streets were broad and amply shaded by magnificent elm and oak trees. The locusts droning in the boughs seemed to be an audible expression of the heat, which was great in spite of the shade and the watered streets. At a corner several small, barefooted children were running in the wake of the sprinkling cart, laughing and shouting noisily when one too venturesome tot got a shower from the spray.

"How wet and dirty and happy they are, poor little souls," said Miss Jones.

"Why poor little souls?" objected Lucile. "They are having a very good time."

"Yes, but they are such neglected little

mites," sighed the teacher. "I daresay that four or five out of the six of them have no mothers to care if they are wet and dirty—or even happy," she added with another sigh.

"Well, neither have I, for that matter," said Lucile quickly, "and you don't seem to waste any pity on me."

This was Lucile's favorite grievance. Miss Jones regretted the light in which she viewed her motherless state, using it as an excuse for wrong-doing, as a plea for sympathy and as a barrier of self-defense. She turned to her pupil with a smile that was partly of irritation, and partly of amusement.

"Don't you really see any difference?" she asked.

Lucile understood the smile and flushed.

"Now you are making fun of me," she said, offended. "It just shows how silly I was to talk about it."

"I was not laughing at you, believe me," replied Miss Jones with sudden seriousness. "But stop and consider the difference between yourself and those children. You are surrounded by all the comforts and luxuries of life. You have plenty of food, the best clothes that money can buy, a beautiful home and hosts of friends.

These little mites live in garrets and cellars when they are not in the streets. They are nearly always hungry and in winter have not enough clothes to keep them warm. And when I said they probably had no mothers to care for their happiness I did not mean that they were necessarily dead, but were doubtless the sort of mother who is selfishly indifferent to her child's love or happiness."

"Oh," exclaimed Lucile, "that would be worse than not having a mother at all!"

"Exactly. And don't you see how much you have to be thankful for in life?"

"Yes—of course," admitted Lucile reluctantly. "When you put it all on such a big scale as that. But you see, when some little every-day thing comes to bother me, I can't stop and remember how much better off I am than some other people."

Miss Jones smiled again at this simple explanation of the futility of philosophy.

"What was the 'little, every-day thing' that was bothering you this morning?" she asked unexpectedly.

"Oh—nothing," answered Lucile evasively, flushing again.

Her father had been telling her of his decision

in regard to the reading class. She considered the project as meant to be a further punishment for her disobedience in regard to Rubble. Moreover, she shrewdly suspected that the suggestion had come originally from her governess, and resented it. Miss Jones guessed what was in her mind, but wisely refrained from further questioning.

"Here we are at the post-office," she said abruptly. "I want to get some stamps. Will you come in with me?"

Lucile liked to go to the post-office. It was a constant marvel to her how they ever managed, with so many, many letters, and such a lot of people to whom to give them, to get the right letters to the right persons.

"The system is very interesting," said Miss Jones. "We'll get permission sometime to be shown over the building," and she described the various departments; how the outgoing letters were sorted, first as to the state to which they were to be sent, then the town, district and so on. "And there is a special department," she concluded, "for deciphering careless and illegible addresses. You have no idea what queer looking specimens of handwriting they get in the post-office."

"And do they always find out what the writing stands for?" asked Lucile interestedly.

"In nearly every case. They get to be very expert. Then too, people have such odd ideas about addresses. They leave off the most important part, such as the state or town, and often spell words so incorrectly that it takes shrewd guessing to make them out."

Lucile laughed.

"How stupid! I can understand how people could misspell words inside a letter, but I should think they'd be too proud to do it in the address. I remember hearing once," she went on animatedly, "of a man who wanted to write to Mr. Blaine, and he didn't have any address. But he knew that everyone knew who Mr. Blaine was, so he just wrote a verse on the envelope, about the letter being for 'Mr. Blaine from the state of Maine' or something like that, and trusted to the postmaster to see that it went right."

"That showed an ingenious mind at any rate," replied Miss Jones, "though if he'd been practical he would have gone to the postmaster and asked him for the right address."

When Miss Jones had finished her shopping they turned their steps to the market, to take home some fresh fruit for luncheon. Lucile

looked about her with interested, observant eyes as they passed down the aisles of the market, lined on either side by stalls of meat, vegetables and fruit.

"Miss Jones," she said, "don't you think we could buy some fruit and take it to Johnny Smith? He isn't quite well yet, you know and there are such lots of good things here."

"Very well," assented Miss Jones readily, glancing at her watch. "We shall have time in case I can have the berries sent?" She turned to the salesman from whom she had just made her purchase.

"Yes indeed, ma'am," he replied obligingly. "Our wagon's just going out. Hold on, Ben, and take these berries," he called to a boy. "Anything else, ladies?"

"I want some fruit," said Lucile. "I guess you may give me a basket of different sorts. Don't you think so, Miss Jones?"

"I'd get something simple," replied her teacher. "Those pears look nice."

The basket was filled and a piece of paper tied over the top. Lucile paid for it and started off gayly on her errand of mercy. Miss Jones had an impulse to pay for the fruit out of the housekeeping money in her own purse, but she

refrained, thinking that Lucile would be happier to have the gift of her own making.

Their way now took them down into the lower part of the town, where the streets were narrow and dry and the houses were huddled together in gloomy, unkempt masses. The air was stiflingly hot and ill-smelling. Soapy water stood in the gutters and the sidewalk was covered with the indiscriminate sweepings of front entries. The sun beat down upon dull rows of dingy buildings, with small uncurtained windows. Women in shabby garments talked together on the doorsteps and the street was thronged with dirty, ragged urchins with pinched faces and wistful eyes. They all stared curiously at Miss Jones and Lucile as they passed.

"Oh dear," whispered Lucile, "isn't it sad! I almost wish we hadn't come."

They turned down a side street which led to the court where Johnny Smith lived. Miss Jones caught Lucile's arm and stopped her. Half a square ahead of them a crowd had gathered on the narrow sidewalk, extending out into the street and quite blocking the way. Miss Jones thought it was a street fight and wanted to turn back.

"No it isn't," exclaimed Lucile excitedly.

"Somebody's ill. See that poor woman sitting on the step and a man leaning over her. Oh, Miss Jones, we must do something! See those poor little children crying, and the woman has a baby in her arms!"

She pushed forward hurriedly, Miss Jones following close behind. The crowd parted to let them through and Miss Jones stepped up to the man who was bending over the woman. It was a melancholy little group and Lucile's heart was torn with pity. A woman sat huddled on a doorstep, looking about her with hunted, defiant eyes. She held tight clasped in her arms a tiny infant, while three other children clustered about her skirts, crying feebly. A man, evidently the husband and father, was trying helplessly to pacify them and to persuade the woman to let him hold the baby. Miss Jones touched him on the arm.

"What is it?" she asked. "What has happened? Is your wife ill?"

"Yes, she is," replied the man gruffly, regarding Miss Jones with suspicion in spite of her gentleness of tone and manner. As he moved, they saw that he was lame.

"Well, then, she can't stay here. You must let me help you. Where is your home?"

The man flushed angrily. He turned away his head and clenched his fist.

"That's just it," exclaimed a voice from the crowd. "They ain't got no home."

"No home!" ejaculated Miss Jones. "But surely——"

"They was put out for not payin' their rent," explained another voice.

"Turned out into the street!" cried Miss Jones indignantly, "with all those children and that poor baby in this heat!"

"She don't care nothin' about heat—or babies. It's her rent she's after!" said several voices from the crowd.

"Who is 'she'?" demanded Miss Jones, looking about her.

"Miss Granville—her that owns these houses," a woman spoke up. "This sort of thing happens pretty often in her houses."

"She's a hard 'un—is Miss Granville," commented a man.

"Aye, that she is," agreed another. "I'm thankful it ain't my lot to live in a house o' hers."

"And they say she has a grand big house and hires ten 'helps,'" added a third.

Lucile looked about her with dilated eyes.

"Oh Miss Jones," she said piteously, "isn't it dreadful! What shall we do?"

"The first thing is to get this poor woman into a hospital," said Miss Jones practically. Then she was seized with a sudden panic lest the woman be sickening with an infectious disease. "What's the matter with your wife?" she asked the man.

"Somethin' wrong with her lungs. The doctor said she'd get well if I could give her the right medicine, but I can't," answered the man stoically.

"Then you won't mind her going to a hospital? They can give her the right medicine there."

"Will they let me take the bebbby?" demanded the woman peevishly. "Fer I ain't goin' to give it up to nobody."

Miss Jones remembered seeing a tiny restaurant at the corner of the street. With the husband's help she lifted the woman to her feet and supported her to the corner. Lucile followed, holding the two younger children each by a hand while to the third who carried it proudly, she confided the care of the basket.

Miss Jones planned her course of action as they walked. Suspecting that the woman's

weakness was due mostly to hunger, and perceiving that the man stumbled feebly, she ordered a simple meal from the restaurant keeper, who opened his darkened room with some reluctance. The interior of the restaurant was cool and clean, though rough and filled with the odors of stale cooking. To her relief she found that he had a telephone and spent a busy quarter of an hour; while Lucile, all thoughts of Johnny Smith and his comfort banished by the sight of this greater misery, opened the basket and doled out pears lavishly, with no fear of spoiling appetites for the heartier repast to follow.

Miss Jones experienced some difficulty in disposing of this large group of destitutes, but she found a charitable hospital for the mother where they consented to take the baby, and made arrangements for sending the children to a country nursery.

When it had all been accomplished—when the woman had been driven away in a cab, satisfied because she was to receive care and kind treatment for a while; when the children had been driven off in an omnibus, their fright at being separated from their parents comforted by promises of green grass and apple trees; and the man, more hopeful than he had been for weeks,

had limped off to the Mission in search of work—when it was all over and the episode closed, Lucile threw herself into Miss Jones's arms and burst into tears.

"Oh, Miss Jones, what would have become of them if we hadn't happened to come just then?" Then she lifted her flushed, excited face and her eyes flashed indignantly through her tears. "What a cruel, heartless woman that landlady must be! Oh, I wish we could do something to make her suffer in return for all——"

"Hush, hush, Lucile. You are excited and tired now. Don't judge her hastily. There may be extenuating circumstances."

"I don't know what sort of circumstances those may be," replied Lucile, spiritedly, "but I am sure there can be no reason good enough to permit a woman turning a sick woman and four helpless little children into the street to starve! I shall never forget it, never!"

And though Lucile did not refer to the subject again, she never forgot it.

The scene had impressed itself indelibly upon her memory and the knowledge that a woman who was rich and powerful could commit an act so selfishly cruel, was almost incredible to her. It

is possible however, that the incident might in time have faded from her memory, or have lost the force of its vividness, had not another circumstance occurred to fix the recollection of it in her mind.

CHAPTER IV

THE READING CLASS

EDITH WHARTON was just putting away her music books, after her usual morning hour of practise, when Nan Campbell burst in upon her in her accustomed impetuous way. "Oh, Edie, are you going to join? Won't it be lovely!" she exclaimed, flinging her arms around Edith's neck and twirling her about the room.

"Join what?" asked Edith calmly, mildly enduring the peripatetic embrace, for she was used to Nan's ways, and felt sure that the 'perfectly lovely' something was nothing of an overwhelming nature.

"Why," ejaculated Nan, dropping breathlessly upon a chair and fanning herself with her hat, "haven't you got Lucile's note yet, telling you about the reading class? She said she was going to ask you, so I rushed right over to talk about it."

"It probably came while I was practising. I heard the bell ring, but mamma never allows me to be interrupted," answered Edith. "Let's go and see."

Sure enough, on the hall table lay an envelope addressed in Lucile Wentworth's bold, plain handwriting.

The note contained a proposition that the three girls should meet every other morning at Lucile's house to read aloud, with the assistance of Miss Jones, some one of Shakespeare's plays. The play to be read and the manner of reading were left to be decided upon at the first meeting. The note was not at all in Lucile's usual enthusiastic style, and Edith guessed at once that the idea was not her own.

"She doesn't like it and I can just see the face she made when she wrote this," thought Edith, but all she said aloud was: "I think it will be great fun. Come up-stairs while I get my hat and we'll go talk it over with Lucile right away."

The two girls paused at the door of Mrs. Wharton's room to tell her the new plan, of which Edith's mother approved most heartily.

"I hope it will help to keep Lucile out of mischief," she said, for the fright of the runaway was still fresh in her mind and she was provoked with Lucile for having led her daughter into such danger.

"But, mamma," remonstrated Edith, "it

wasn't Lucile's fault that Rubble ran away. She had been hurrying so that we could get home in time, and a horrid man came rattling up behind with a rickety wagon and that frightened the horse."

"Weren't you both awfully scared?" asked Nan. "I'd have jumped."

"Yes, and broken your neck. But then," added Edith, as a recollection of the horrible sensation of the dashing horse came back to her, "I think that I'd have jumped too, if I'd had strength enough. I don't see how in the world Lucile managed to hang on to the reins."

"Or to think of stopping Rubble by throwing him. But Lucile is so awfully plucky, and never does lose her head like the rest of us. But hurry up. I'm anxious to learn more about the class. If we vote on which play to read, what one will you choose?"

They found Lucile in her own pretty room, pasting kodak pictures into a large album. She greeted them delightedly but seemed surprised at their enthusiasm over the proposed club.

"Why, maybe it will be fun," she said, the idea appearing to her in a new light. "I thought it some sort of trap for lessons, but father said to try it for a week."

"It won't be anything like lessons," declared Nan. "I've always been dying to belong to a Shakespeare club. It sounds so important and—and grown-up! Don't you think so, Edie?"

"Yes, indeed. The girls over at the college have one, and cousin Beatrice wrote me that after they have read a play and written essays about it and had debates and all that, why then, they give tableaux of some of the scenes."

"How glorious!" cried Nan, rapturously. "Oh, Lucile, don't you suppose we could do that? I adore dressing up!"

"Why, of course we can. It will be the very thing!" cried Lucile, catching the enthusiasm. "Come, let's hunt up Miss Jones at once."

Thus the reading class was formed and "The Merchant of Venice" unanimously chosen with which to begin the readings. Miss Jones was charmed at the lively interest shown, for the three girls were accustomed to do well whatever they undertook, and they put their heart into their work. Miss Jones said nothing of the new scheme to Mr. Wentworth until she was assured of its success; then she carried him a glowing report. To her disappointment she was received with his old-time preoccupation—almost indifference, she thought despairingly.

"I am glad if the child is interested at last. It keeps her out of mischief. And let her have her tableaux if she likes," he replied carelessly.

He fingered a paper-knife in an absent-minded way and his thoughts were so evidently elsewhere that Miss Jones soon rose to go, apologizing for having intruded upon his time. But at the door he called her back, and began to speak in a hasty, disjointed way, with more nervousness in his manner than she had ever seen him display before.

"Miss Jones, I—I—feel it is only right to tell you now that I—that is—will you please be looking out for another engagement?"

Miss Jones looked both surprised and hurt.

"I know—I realize that I have not succeeded very well with Lucile," she said regretfully. "But I was beginning to think that I was getting on. This new interest—her enthusiasm——"

"Oh, it isn't that," interrupted Mr. Wentworth hastily, "It is— In fact, Miss Jones, I must tell you that I expect to be married again this fall, and——"

He paused as if expecting some comment, but Miss Jones was silent and her bowed head concealed her face from him.

"As to Lucile," resumed Mr. Wentworth after a moment, "I think of sending her away to boarding-school."

"Yes, sir," said Miss Jones. It was a very flat rejoinder, she knew, but she was too astonished for the moment to think of anything else to say.

"Can you suggest any good school?" pursued Mr. Wentworth. "I have been in correspondence with several and have their circulars here." He mentioned some of the leading schools in the country. "They all read well, but I should like to have some one's personal impressions, and have written to the references given of two or three of the most promising."

"I am divided between a country and a city school," he went on, speaking quickly and much more at ease as if glad to have gotten off the other subject. "Of course a country school is better as regards out-door exercise and all that. But I rather think that Lucile needs the advantages that a school in the city affords; the necessity for dignified behavior on the street for one thing. It seems to me that Lucile is a little old for such violent romping as she indulges in. She—ah—runs so in the street. Then I have noticed her playing on the lawn with her friends and they

shout so, and laugh aloud, almost like boys. Lucile ought to begin behaving more like a young lady now."

"Oh, Mr. Wentworth," begged the governess, "don't put such notions into Lucile's head! Let her be a child as long as she will. Girls now-a-days are so different—so modish and artificial; they seem to have no girlhood. They spring from infancy into young ladyhood, with foolish ideas of—of men, into whom they magnify the boys of their acquaintance. Lucile is such an innocent, honest, natural girl. I beseech you not to send her to any fashionable school at this impressionable age. But there, I beg your pardon for speaking so impetuously," she ended with reddening cheeks under Mr. Wentworth's amused smile.

Shy, quiet Miss Jones had never broken out in this way before and Mr. Wentworth was rather astonished at her outburst. But it pleased him to learn that the governess had his daughter's interest more deeply at heart than he had supposed. Little did he guess the contempt that he had aroused in her breast:

"His lazy, idle nature shirks the responsibility of her bringing up," she was thinking scornfully. "He intends to tuck her away in some fashion-

able boarding-school where he can feel that he is doing his duty by her and yet can be free to enjoy his new wife."

But this one wrong Miss Jones was determined to prevent if she could, so, before Mr. Wentworth could speak again she went on bravely :

"You must know that Lucile is very impressionable. These next two or three years will affect the formation of her whole character for life, and it seems to me that you cannot be too careful in selecting the influences that are to surround her."

"I was not thinking of a fashionable school," replied Mr. Wentworth. "Here," gathering up several pamphlets that lay in a little pile upon his desk, "are the circulars of the various schools. I should be very much obliged to you indeed if you would look them over and make any suggestions you can toward helping me in my selection."

Miss Jones took the papers, saying :

"I will gladly do what I can to assist you, but I am afraid that my advice will be little worth having."

She started to go, hesitated and then turned back.

"Is—does—am I to say anything of this to Lucile?" she asked slowly.

“No, by no means,” replied Mr. Wentworth a trifle sharply. “At least, that is, I prefer that she heard it first from me. I shall speak to her about the matter—about both matters, soon. Until then, I beg you will say nothing to her on either subject.”

Miss Jones bowed and left the room. Glancing at the hall clock, she saw to her dismay that it was already the hour at which the reading class met. Hurrying up to her own room, she laid aside the circulars and crossed the hall to the schoolroom, in which the three girls were already assembled.

This was a large, bright corner room, which had been dedicated to Lucile’s use since her birth. In her babyhood and childhood, it was known as the day nursery, but as she grew older the name was changed to the more appropriate title of schoolroom. The room was the embodiment of cheerfulness and comfort; the wall-paper was of a cream tint, covered with garlands of roses, with cretonne hangings and chair coverings of the same pattern. Lucile’s desk stood by one window, her work-table by another; a bookshelf extended across one side of the room and contained all the books that Lucile had ever received, each telling its own story; some as neat and dainty as the

day they were unwrapped, others grimy and tattered with the binding half off. There were several easy chairs in the room, and a capacious lounge, the decrepit condition of whose springs suggested many a romp and the faded appearance of the cushions hinted at frequent washings after the hard usage of pillow fighting. In the center of the room stood a large, heavy table or office-desk, its flat, blotter-covered top besmeared with ink-stains of red and black, and much littered with pens, ink-wells, old letters, loose papers and the general paraphernalia of a writing-desk.

About this table clustered the three girls, all bending eagerly over a book which Lucile, seated between the other two, was holding.

"Oh, Miss Jones," she cried eagerly, looking up as her governess entered, "did father say we could do it?"

"Yes," replied Miss Jones, coming forward and laying her copy of "The Merchant of Venice" on the table. "He said you might give the tableaux, and invite as many of your girl friends to see them as you liked, Lucile."

"Oh," cried Nan, "what a generous old dear your father is, Lucile!"

"Thanks, Miss Jones," replied Lucile calmly,

taking the liberal permission quite for granted. "See, we are just looking over my illustrated edition for costumes. Here is Portia, in a red velvet robe, but we thought a college cap and gown would do, don't you? Edie's cousin Beatrice has promised to lend her hers. For Edith's to be Portia, you know, and I, Shylock."

"Yes, and I've chosen Gratiano," broke in Nan, gayly, "'Now, infidel, I have thee on the hip,'" she cried, poking Lucile under the arm, which compliment Lucile returned with interest, and then flew around the table for refuge. A general romp ensued for several minutes, which Miss Jones did not attempt to check, and the girls, hot and breathless, were soon glad to resume their places about the big table, and to discuss the project of who was to be who and what each was to wear.

The filling of the remaining characters in the cast was the most important item to be settled and it took a good deal of picking and choosing to fit the right ones into the right places.

"Have Gladys Hurst for the duke," proposed Lucile. "She will look so stately, and maybe her mother will lend us her party wrap trimmed with ermine to use as the Judge's robe."

"Yes, and Milly Clarke must be Bassanio," chimed in Nan.

"Oh, don't you think she'd do better as the merchant?" objected Edith. "She's so dignified."

"I think so too," agreed Lucile, "and her sister Jane will make a dear little page. Bertha Matthews will look much better as Bassanio."

"All right," assented Nan amicably. "But hadn't we better ask them all if they will take part?"

"Oh, they're sure to be willing. They've all been dying to join the class from the first," declared Edith. "But I wish we could see them all to plan about the practising."

"I suppose we'll practise here during reading hour, won't we, Miss Jones?" asked Lucile. "And how soon do you think we can have the tableaux?"

"That's impossible to say," replied Miss Jones smiling. "It depends entirely upon how industrious you all are about learning and practising your poses."

After a little further discussion it was decided that they should visit the other girls that same morning after class, and Lucile was excused to go and order the landau.

"It'll be awfully pokey in the carriage," she apologized, "but I can't drive my cart any more, for my horse has been sent to pasture because of a lame foot."

The reading proved less absorbing than usual, and all three girls closed their books with an excited slam when the clock struck eleven.

"Miss Jones, you know the carriage seats four. Won't you come along?" asked Lucile.

She had gotten on much better with her governess since the reading class had been formed. She discovered that Miss Jones possessed a thorough appreciation of fun, and she often forgot the teacher in the companion.

"Why, thank you," replied Miss Jones brightly, "I can't spare the time to stay out with you all the time, but I should enjoy a short drive if you will drop me at the post-office."

Five minutes later, as Miss Jones was hurrying down-stairs to join the girls in the carriage, she met Mr. Wentworth coming out of the library.

"Ah, Miss Jones," he said stopping her, "I have just received another circular. It reads more promisingly to me than any of the others. May I send it up to your room? Oh, and—" he added hesitatingly, "I noticed an advertisement in the 'Times' this morning by this same

school for a teacher in English. Possibly you might care to——” He stopped, embarrassed.

“Thank you for thinking of me, Mr. Wentworth,” she answered quietly. “If I may see the advertisement and the circular, I have no doubt that I shall find that the wisest thing I could do — to apply for the position!”

As she hurried out to the impatient trio she thought: “To be in the same school with Lucile would be next best to having her alone—better, I daresay, for her, since the spirit of competition seems to rouse her interest so effectually. I wonder if Mr. Wentworth had any wish to have me near her when he suggested the position to me.”

She tried to take part in the conversation, for she feared that Lucile, who, coming back for a forgotten pair of gloves, had seen her talking with her father, might notice her absent-mindedness and comment upon it.

But Lucile was too absorbed in her new project to be as observant as usual of those about her. Neither did she perceive at luncheon the slight constraint that existed between her father and Miss Jones.

CHAPTER V

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

"O father," cried Lucile, bursting unceremoniously into the library one August morning, "where is your old black mackintosh? I want it for Shylock. We are practising up-stairs and——"

Mr. Wentworth looked up from his writing with a frown.

"Lucile, when will you learn to enter a room properly, and not come in upon me in that boisterous fashion when I am busy!"

"I beg pardon," said Lucile. "I forgot, I was in such a hurry. They are waiting for me to go on."

"Well, what do you want? And what about practising?" asked her father.

"Why—why—why our practising! Tableaux from the 'Merchant of Venice,' you know. We've been at it for weeks and weeks. Surely you haven't forgotten!" she cried in dismay.

Mr. Wentworth looked a trifle abashed.

"I do remember something about it now," he

replied. "Though I am afraid I had forgotten it for the moment. I've been very much occupied lately with important matters."

"But we've talked about it and planned for it, Miss Jones and I, every single day, at breakfast, luncheon and dinner. I don't see how you could have forgotten!" exclaimed Lucile.

"I am afraid I could not have been very attentive to table conversation," answered her father apologetically. "It is an outcome of your reading class, I suppose. When does the entertainment take place?" And he tried to throw sufficient interest into his voice to make up for past remissness. But Lucile was only the more hurt.

"Why, it's to be next Friday evening," she said slowly, "and you said I might ask my friends to come. For the tableaux are to be here in our back drawing-room."

"Ah, to be sure. I remember now. Miss Jones spoke to me about it. All right, ask as many of your friends as you like, and make a regular party of it."

"But, father," protested Lucile, only half comforted, "a party's not much fun without boys, and of course we couldn't ask them to the tableaux because we girls have to dress up, you know."

"Well, then ask them to come in at the end of it and you can slip into your long dresses," responded her father with a smile. "I insist upon the party," he added lightly, "and make it as big as you wish. It can be a sort of farewell concern." Though he spoke carelessly, Mr. Wentworth was watching his daughter closely, to see the effect of his words.

Lucile had been rummaging in the closet for the mackintosh in question, and she now turned, holding it clasped in her arms.

"A sort of farewell! Why, what do you mean, father?" she asked in a puzzled voice.

"I have been thinking rather seriously of sending you away to boarding-school this fall," he replied slowly, dreading the effect of his words.

But Lucile received his news in a very different manner from what he had expected.

"Boarding-school!" she ejaculated, dropping her bundle and flying over to his chair, "oh, you dear, dear father! That's just what I've always wanted to do! Only," she added, as the full meaning of the idea came over her, "it will be rather lonely at first. I'll miss the girls; and Miss Jones. It's too bad, just as I had begun to get fond of her."

"And how about me?" asked her father, with seeming nonchalance.

"Oh," said the girl carelessly, all unconscious of the pain she was giving, "you could come to visit me, sometimes, couldn't you? And that is about all I ever see of you at home, you know. But I must go or the girls will be furious at being kept waiting. You'll tell me all about it, where the school is and everything, some other time, won't you?" And she ran from the room, leaving her father with an aching heart.

Lucile did not pose as well as usual that afternoon, in the tableaux. Indeed, her thoughts were so taken up with what her father had told her that she even forgot the proposed party until the girls crowded about her to ask what had kept her so long away.

"Why, I was talking to father about the tableaux," she said. "And, girls, he says I may ask as many as I like and the boys to come after the entertainment."

"Oh, how awfully jolly!" chimed the girls in chorus. "When are you going to send out the invitations, Lucile?"

"I think it ought to be done right away, don't you? All come up to the schoolroom and help me make out a list and then we can write the notes."

The girls accepted this invitation delightedly. Many hands made light work and by luncheon time quite a heap of notes lay on the schoolroom table, ready for distribution. As soon as the girls had gone, Lucile ran up to Miss Jones's room and knocked at the door.

"O Miss Jones," she exclaimed eagerly, as in answer to Miss Jones's 'come in,' she entered the room, "father has just told me something! What do you think? I'm to go to boarding-school this fall! Just think! I didn't have time to ask him any questions. It was when I went for the mackintosh, you know. So I didn't want to say anything about it to the girls until I knew when I am to go, and where the school is. But I just had to tell some one. Why, I believe you know all about it already," she ejaculated suddenly, eying the governess narrowly.

"I don't know whether I am glad or sorry," she went on, as Miss Jones acknowledged having already been put in possession of the secret. "I've always wanted to go to boarding-school, but just lately things have been so much nicer, and I shall miss you terribly," she said, in a tone of real regret that made Miss Jones flush with pleasure.

"But do tell me all you know about it,"

begged Lucile eagerly. "Father won't mind. He'd have told me then, I'm sure, if I'd had time to listen. I had to ask him to put it off."

Miss Jones could not help feeling amused at the idea of the dignified Mr. Wentworth being "put off" by his flyaway daughter. But, as long as Lucile knew that she was to go away to school, the governess could see no reason why she should not tell her all that she herself knew about it and replied :

"You are to go Miss Hobart's school, in Washington."

"Washington! Oh, how glorious!" cried Lucile, jumping up and whirling about the room in an ecstasy. "How I have always longed to go to Washington! To think of living, actually living, in the same town with the President and senators and all—where the laws of the Nation are made! How important it makes me feel! And Miss Jones, I'll see the Capitol, and the White House, and maybe the President himself! What larks! I feel like saying what Nan Campbell did; what a generous old dear my father is! Washington! Washington! Just think, Miss Jones, Washington! When do you think I'll go? Oh, I'm so glad!"

"And yet, when you came in, you weren't at

all sure of your feelings," Miss Jones reminded her mischievously.

"O Miss Jones! But that was before I knew. I thought father might be going to send me to some stupid, pokey country town, where I'd get dreadfully homesick and dull. But there! It will be going among strangers even in Washington, and I shall hate that," and she sighed mournfully, coming down with a rush from the clouds of her delight. O Miss Jones, it'll be horrid to go among a lot of strange new girls and teachers, without a single familiar face! Of course I'll have to go by myself! Most girls have their mothers to take them. Oh, Miss Jones, I wish you were going with me!"

"Oh, do you?" cried Miss Jones, impulsively. "Well, how do you know that I'm not?"

"Miss Jones! Do you really mean it?"

"Yes," replied the governess. "Miss Hobart advertised for a teacher in English, and thanks to your father's kind recommendation, I secured the appointment."

"Then, that just makes it perfect," declared Lucile with a deep breath of content. "Now I won't be packed off among a lot of strange people by myself."

This speech would have given her father

another heart-stab if he had heard it; his daughter's quiet taking for granted that he would not spare himself the time to introduce her into her new surroundings. But, though her reference to the short, infrequent glimpses that she had of him at home, hurt Mr. Wentworth, still, his sensation, as she left him after his announcement, was mainly one of relief that she had taken his news so favorably. He had feared that she would fly into one of those uncontrollable tempers of hers, which his own hasty spirit prevented his checking properly. At such times, many regrettable words were spoken by both, Lucile's anger allowing her so far to forget herself as to become impertinent and rude, and her father in turn growing stern and harsh. Therefore, Mr. Wentworth always experienced a sense of defeat and shame at the end of these scenes, and it was partly for the discipline over her temper which he hoped she would receive, that he was sending her away to school. But it was not the only reason, he confessed to himself. And he dreaded very much telling his daughter that other piece of news, which, while it made his heart so light, rested somewhat heavily upon his conscience.

"If only I could think that she would take it

in the same spirit as she took the school idea," he reflected as he returned to his writing.

He decided not to broach the subject until after this party which at present seemed to be absorbing his daughter's mind—even, indeed to the temporary exclusion of boarding-school.

Lucile was very anxious that the tableaux should go off well. The girls had studied their poses faithfully, and had practised them with much painstaking. Indeed, they had succeeded in forming very pretty pictures, and some of them displayed much grace of pose and good taste in arrangement.

The entertainment was given in the back drawing-room, the audience being seated in the front drawing-room; a curtain of dark green cambric hung across the doorway, dividing off the stage. Mr. Wentworth had permitted a low platform to be erected and Lucile had constructed footlights out of kitchen lamps and tin reflectors. As the whole of the room would not be needed as a stage, a portion was measured off and hung round with walls of black cambric, which made an excellent background for the pictures. The part of the room thus cut off from view served as a dressing-room.

The girls had shown great ingenuity in the

contriving of the costumes. Portia's robe consisted of a flowing silk college gown and Oxford cap. Lucile, as Shylock, draped herself in a long, black mackintosh, with scales and a butcher knife of imposing size at her belt, her face completely disguised by a flowing gray beard (greatly to the depletion of the stuffing of an old horse-hair sofa in the attic) with mustache, wig and eyebrows, pasted on, to match. The other costumes, with the exception of the duke's, were much alike; short kilted skirts, long silk stockings with buckled shoes and gartered with ribbon of a color to match the lining of the short cloaks fastened to their shoulders. Some had constructed wigs for themselves, others had put their own hair into queues. Gladys Hurst, as the duke, was the most elaborately clothed. Her fair hair was rolled in the approved judicial fashion of the period, thickly powdered, and her slender, stately figure was completely wrapped in the rich folds of the ermine trimmed cape which, as Lucile had hoped, her mother had permitted her to wear.

The audience, which consisted of about fifty of Lucile's girl friends and the mothers and aunts of those taking part in the tableaux, assembled promptly at the appointed hour, and the animated buzz of their voices could be heard by the excited



"I KNOW I'LL FORGET"



young performers, who took turns peeping through a hole in the curtain and flying into the dressing-room to report new arrivals.

"Girls, girls," cried Lucile excitedly, "everybody's come and it looks awfully pretty and gay with their party dresses, and I know I'll forget where to stand and everything!"

"Oh, don't say that, Lucile," exclaimed Edith with a little shiver, "or you'll give me stage fright. Oh, Miss Jones, do you suppose I can keep a straight face in the scene with the caskets?"

Miss Jones, who had constituted herself combined prompter and stage manager, smiled encouragingly.

"Why, of course you will. There is no reason why you shouldn't. Just do your best and forget that any one is looking; or if you can't put your audience out of your mind, remember that your mother is among them, and how disappointed she will be to have you laugh or spoil the picture."

The girls all listened to this little piece of advice, and as the time to commence drew near, their excitement was sobered and they stood quietly, waiting the time of the different tableaux in which they were to take part. The pictures were certainly artistic and the girls held their

positions steadily. Not an eyelid fluttered nor a lip quivered. The audience was in a flurry of interested pleasure. The mothers exchanged proud glances, and the girls whispers of approval. A general shudder went through the assembly as Shylock leaned menacingly, gloatingly, over the bravely kneeling merchant, holding aloft his shining knife ; and Portia's stern, forbidding expression as she checked the movement with outstretched arm, was admirable. The scene of Shylock's final overthrow ; his dazed, pitiful endeavor to grasp the meaning of his many misfortunes, were portrayed in a masterly way, and a murmur of pity greeted Lucile as the humiliated, overmastered Jew.

Miss Jones gave her a congratulatory squeeze of the hand as Lucile took off the hot wig and stood beside her to watch the last tableau. Miss Jones was intent upon her duties, for both the merchant and Bassanio were growing a little nervous. But Lucile, glancing about in an aimless, waiting fashion, suddenly caught sight of something that made her spring across the room with a smothered scream.

In dressing, the girls had used a large lamp for burning a cork with which to blacken eyebrows and make wrinkles. The lamp had been set on

the floor to free the table for other purposes, and a breeze from the open window had fanned a corner of the cambric hanging perilously near the top of the chimney. A little stronger draft finally wafted the flimsy stuff across the glass, and it lodged over the top. The cotton smoldered for an instant and then burst into a bright, angry, yellow flame. And so, as Portia stood holding out her hand for the ring that Bassanio seemed so reluctant to give, performers and audience alike were startled by a scream and the sudden jerking down of the hangings, disclosing Lucile and Miss Jones endeavoring to stamp out the burning cloth.

In an instant all was confusion. Edith, seizing the heavy rug that had draped the judge's throne, threw it upon the flames. At the same moment Nan Campbell appeared from somewhere with two big pitchers of water which she poured impartially upon Lucile and the now smothered conflagration.

This incident relieved the general tremor of alarm, and by the time the frightened audience had succeeded in clambering up to the stage between the footlights, they found Lucile choking and laughing over her unexpected shower bath, and no harm done.

CHAPTER VI

BAD NEWS FOR LUCILE

"Lucile, come here. I would like to speak to you."

Mr. Wentworth stood in the doorway of the library and intercepted his daughter on her return from a visit to Edith.

She and her friend had been talking over the entertainment, a feminine custom which affords almost as great enjoyment as an event itself. They had also discussed Lucile's approaching departure for boarding-school, and exchanged promises of weekly letters. Lucile was in a particularly gay mood, and resented the grave, almost stern tone of her father's voice, as a check upon her buoyant spirits. It was on the tip of her tongue to make some excuse, to go to him later, but there were times when Lucile dared not go against her father's wishes, and when he spoke in that decisive, I've-made-up-my-mind tone, was one of them. She could not guess that the severe manner was only a cloak to hide his real feelings; a

dread of the pain that the news he was to tell her might impart, coupled with an ardent longing for her daughterly love and sympathy.

Assuming the half defiant, half-sullen air that she wore when she had been naughty and expected a scolding, Lucile passed into the library and sat down. She had always disliked the room. It was large and gloomy, with formal furnishings, and always immaculately tidy. The books on the shelves never had a gap, as if some one had taken down a volume to read. They might as well be blocks of painted wood, Lucile had reflected more than once. Her own books were all up-stairs in the schoolroom ; grimy, dog-eared sets of Scott and Dickens. Those same authors' works, in rich, expensive bindings, stood in solid rows upon the library shelves, untouched except for dusting. Lucile had her own ideas of what a library should be like, and what she meant to have when she grew up and had a home of her own. The schoolroom fitted her idea as far as comfort went, only the furnishings must be richer—great, deep, easy chairs of red leather, marble busts on pedestals between the bookcases and always a bright fire of logs on the hearth. And the table should always be comfortably littered with papers, not trim and tidy like her father's

desk, upon which the papers and letters were pigeon-holed, or laid in neat, compact piles bound with india-rubber bands.

Another reason for her dislike of the room was that it was here that her father gave her all her scoldings and meted out his frequent and often severe punishments, so that the mere fact of his summoning her to the library meant to Lucile an unpleasant interview.

She sat down on the chair that she usually occupied on such occasions—a narrow-seated, straight-backed, uncomfortable chair that she had privately dubbed the penitential seat, though she had rarely sat there in a penitential mood. Nor was such her humor now as she waited impatiently for what her father had to say. She rehearsed her actions of the past few days, and could think of no mischief she had been in. She wondered what the coming reproof might be.

“Lucile,” said her father at last, “I have called you in here to tell you something.”

“Yes, sir,” she replied, a little surprised at this beginning.

“It concerns something—concerns me, in fact—a very important step that I am about to take which will affect both my life and yours very materially, and about which I want to consult you.”

"Consult me!" ejaculated Lucile in utter amazement, wondering if the skies were about to fall. When had her father ever consulted her about anything!

"Certainly," continued her father, a trifle annoyed at her manner. "Why should I not consult my daughter upon important subjects?"

"You never have before," interpolated Lucile coolly.

"Particularly upon so important a subject as—as marriage," proceeded Mr. Wentworth, ignoring her interruption and judging it better to come directly to the point.

"Marriage!" echoed Lucile in an indescribable tone. What in the world could her father be thinking of? Surely he—she—he did not, could not mean that she was to—to consider marrying any one! Her cheeks flushed crimson and she dropped her eyes.

"I—I don't know what you mean, sir," she said weakly.

"I mean," answered her father deliberately, and determined to beat about the bush no longer, "I mean that I am about to be married again."

If he had thrown a lighted bomb at the girl's feet, he could not have horrified her more. Her lips parted in astonishment. She raised her eyes

to her father's face in incredulous silence, then reading there the confirmation of his dreadful words she sank back in her chair; the red faded from her cheeks, her eyes closed and for a moment Mr. Wentworth thought that she would faint. But Lucile quickly controlled her emotion, her lips tightened and her eyes flashed.

"You surely can't mean that, father," she said proudly. "Have you forgotten mamma?"

Mr. Wentworth was abashed. He had expected tears, a wild outburst of anger and protest; but this coldly reproachful sentence left him with no answer.

"Why, of course not, child," he said lamely, his eyes dropping before her scornful gaze. "Don't be so dramatic. You must know that a man cannot live out his whole life alone."

"You could have had me—if you had cared," she said in a low tone, the reality of his disclosure already touching her with its anguish. "O father, father," she sobbed, suddenly throwing herself at his knees, "I know I have been a careless, selfish, thoughtless girl, but I will do better. Oh, I can do better, if you will love me and trust me! I'll do anything you say, be anything you say, only don't, don't bring any one here to take mamma's place! O father, don't!" And she

buried her face upon his knees and burst into a fit of violent, uncontrollable weeping.

"There, there, child," said her father, much moved. "I did not mean to grieve you so. Hush, daughter," and he stroked her hair softly.

But this new tenderness on his part only made the girl weep more bitterly, for she knew that it meant his words were true; that this awful calamity was to befall her.

Mr. Wentworth let her sob on unchecked for a few minutes and then said quietly :

"There, now, Lucile, stop crying and listen to me. This feeling you seem to have in regard to what I have just told you, is not sincere. It is an emotion roused by the surprise I caused you. But it will pass and you will be ready to give me the love and sympathy I had hoped to receive from my daughter."

Lucile's sobs had grown quieter as her father spoke; they ceased entirely as he finished and she rose to her feet, her eyes blazing and her hands working nervously, a habit she had when very angry.

"A passing emotion, indeed!" She burst out almost before he had ceased speaking. "You tell me that you intend to bring somebody whom I've never seen, here to take mamma's place; to

sit where she did at the table, do all that she did—expect me to obey her, perhaps! And then to call what I feel a passing emotion! I always knew you didn't love me and that you thought me a nuisance and all that, but at least I thought you loved mamma! Oh!" And she burst into tears again.

"Lucile, Lucile, you are speaking of things you know nothing about, and I must forbid you to continue. I certainly loved your mother faithfully and devotedly, and her memory is as precious to me as to yourself. As to your promise of loving me; you should begin it by trust."

"Trust you!" cried the girl, her anger at white heat. "How can I trust you when you do such things! Such—such—oh, I cannot! I don't care, I can't! And I wish I need never see you again! Oh, mamma, mamma!" And in a storm of anger and grief the girl swept from the room.

Her father was moved to call her back and demand an apology, but realizing that he himself was angry, knew that further action on his part could only prolong the unpleasant scene, and he wisely refrained. But his dignity was wounded and his pride hurt. However was he to make this tempestuous, wilful child understand that her

mother's memory was in no way wronged by his new attachment!

"It's high time the child did have some one to look after her," he thought. "I only hope that Claire will know how to manage her. But she is sure to, with her sweet tact," and his stern face softened at the thought of the woman he loved.

Meanwhile Lucile was sobbing her heart out in her own room up-stairs. A tide of resentful wrath and utter wretchedness swept over her, and for over an hour she lay moaning and sobbing, or walked up and down the room with dilated eyes and nervous, clenched hands. A stepmother, was there ever a sadder, uglier word? She went over to the mantel, where stood a framed photograph of a young, beautiful woman. Catching it up, she kissed it passionately, over and over again. "Mamma, mamma!" cried the girl. "Oh, he can't do it! He can't!" And again she threw herself upon the couch in a fresh fit of sobbing.

At last she ceased crying from very weariness, and lay still, her eyes, red and swollen, gazing dully before her with an occasional sob catching her breath. She still held the photograph in her hand. The resemblance to her mother was close, promising a remarkable exactitude when Lucile

should have developed out of girlhood. Mrs. Wentworth had died when her daughter was very young, scarcely out of her babyhood, and Lucile had very little recollection of her mother except that she was young and beautiful, and had loved her. But as she grew older and saw the home life of her girl friends, who had their mothers, Lucile felt a great void in her own life and a passionate craving for the mother-love she had hardly known. So she had formed and cherished a love for her mother's memory, which grew stronger with each passing year and which she held as something sacred. Lucile had so often checked herself in some wild whim, or guided her foolish actions by the question: "What would mamma say?" that the thought of an actual person to assume that place seemed indeed a sort of sacrilege. Her anger and resentment against her father were still strong within her, but her violent fit of temper had burned itself out and she lay listless and quiet, with throbbing temples and aching eyes.

A maid knocked at the door and asked if she were coming to luncheon, but Lucile sent her away, saying that she had a bad headache and would not come down, nor did she want anything brought her.

Worn out and hot, at last she fell asleep and

awoke refreshed but still listless and disinclined to move. A gentle tap at the door, followed by Miss Jones's voice, brought her to a sitting posture. The door opened softly and her governess, bearing a daintily spread tray, tip-toed in.

"Please forgive me for coming in," she said, "but I really think you ought to have something to eat. But did I waken you?" she added, pausing.

"No," replied Lucile, "I was already awake, thank you. It was very kind of you to think of me," glancing at the tray.

"And how is the head?" asked Miss Jones, drawing up a small table and moving briskly about, ignoring Lucile's swollen, reddened eyelids.

"Better, thanks; my nap did me good," answered Lucile almost cheerfully.

"Well, then, you will eat this little luncheon, won't you? It will make you feel ever so much better."

Lucile felt half ashamed that she could be hungry in the midst of this deep grief, but her healthy young appetite, unappeased since her early breakfast, clamored for its rights, and she could not resist the tempting tray.

"You were to go to have your blue dress fitted this afternoon," Miss Jones reminded her, sitting

down near by. "I know you don't feel like anything so tiresome," as Lucile made a gesture of impatience, "but I do think the fresh air would cheer you and help your head. What would you say to walking? We can go the back way to the grove. We may find some golden rod on the way."

Lucile would much rather have been left alone, to sit shut up in her own room, but Miss Jones, guessing at the cause of her grief, and feeling that the girl had brooded long enough, was gently insistent. So, putting on her hat, Lucile permitted herself to be taken out into the air. Miss Jones talked cheerfully, not seeming to notice the girl's silence, and as the fresh breeze and exercise cooled and calmed her, Lucile's sullenness became less marked and at last she even volunteered a remark or two.

It was late when they returned and Lucile hurried up the stairs to her own room, with evident dread that she might meet her father on the way.

"I shan't come down to dinner, Miss Jones," she said, turning at her door. "I—I don't feel like it. Katy can bring me something."

"Well, then," suggested her governess, "why shouldn't we have a tea party together in the

schoolroom? I shall have to eat dinner by myself if you refuse," she added, "because your father was called away on business this afternoon. Then afterward we can finish making out that list we started of the things you will need at school."

The schoolroom was very cozy in the autumn twilight, with the big student lamp banished to Lucile's desk in the corner, while the center table was spread with a dainty white cloth and softly lighted by candles with pink shades. After tea, Miss Jones got out pencil and paper and a pleasant discussion ensued over the preparations for Lucile's departure for boarding-school, now not far distant.

Thus passed pleasantly the evening that, had she been left to herself, might have proved the unhappiest of Lucile Wentworth's life. But the bitterness remained and during all the days that followed, she avoided her father as much as possible and looked forward with longing to the day when she might leave home—the house which, she told herself, could now be a home to her no longer.

A few days before the onset for her departure, Mr. Wentworth called Lucile again into his library. He was standing by the open window and Lucile found it easier to talk to him than

when he was seated, judicially, as it were, behind his desk. She came over and stood quite close to him, a sensation of loneliness surging over her grieving heart. She experienced a sudden longing as in the days of her childhood, to make it up and be good again. Mr. Wentworth put his arm caressingly around her shoulders and drew her to him.

"I shall miss my daughter," he said gently.

Lucile looked up at him with eager sympathy. She was about to pour out her heart to him, to ask forgiveness for all her impatience and disobedience. But Mr. Wentworth, who was looking absently out over the lawn went on speaking.

"But you won't be gone long. You are to come back for the wedding."

Lucile's young figure stiffened and she drew herself coldly away from her father's embrace. He turned.

"How does it happen that you have never asked me the name of the woman I am to marry?" he asked lightly.

Lucile flushed and turned away her head. It was on the tip of her tongue to reply; "I suppose it is because I didn't care to know," but she restrained herself.

"I am to marry Miss Claire Granville," went

on her father, as she did not speak. "She lives here. That is, her nominal home is here, though she has spent most of the past few years in traveling. You will not be able to help loving her," he added gently.

Then he glanced at his daughter in concern. Lucile's face was white and her eyes gazed at him wildly.

Miss Granville! That was the name of the landlady who had caused that poor family to be turned out into the street because they would not pay their rent. And her father was to marry her? She was to be Lucile's mother!

"What is it, child?" asked Mr. Wentworth, taking an anxious step toward her. "Are you suffering?"

Lucile regarded him steadily for a moment and then, without replying she turned deliberately and left the room. Her father looked after her with an angry frown gathering on his brow. Then he shrugged his shoulders impatiently and went over to his desk.

Lucile went slowly up-stairs to the schoolroom. In one corner of the room stood a small piano that had been her mother's. The keyboard faced the wall so that the instrument formed a barrier between any one sitting there and the rest of the

room. This quiet nook was Lucile's favorite refuge and she sought it now. She knelt down on the floor and leaning her arms on the window sill, rested her head on them while a torrent of excited, rebellious thoughts rushed through her brain.

Surely her father could not know what sort of woman Miss Granville was—how selfish, how cruel! Should she tell him the incident of the houseless family? No. He would not believe her and there would only be another unpleasant scene. She must make the best of matters.

Then she remembered that Miss Jones too, had heard Miss Granville's name on the street that day. Did she know who it was her father was to marry? Ah, if she did! Lucile felt that she could not bear the mortification of it. She rose and quitted the room. She must know at once. Knocking at Miss Jones' door she entered with the surprising greeting:

"Of course you know that my father is to be married again?"

"Yes. I——"

"Do you know whom he's to marry?" Lucile was watching her narrowly, sternly.

Miss Jones shook her head, wondering.

"Then, please don't ever try to find out!" said Lucile abruptly, and turning, left the room.

CHAPTER VII

GETTING ACQUAINTED

LUCILE's school life began very uneventfully. There were some hard pangs of homesickness, in spite of her proudly assuring herself that she had left nothing in her home life to regret.

Seeing so many new faces was hard to the girl, always shy among strangers, but she speedily outgrew her timidity and became a great favorite among her schoolmates. Ellen Metcalfe, her room-mate, and quite Lucile's opposite in character, became her closest friend, and their intimacy proved to be of the lasting sort.

The manner of Ellen's arrival at the school had excited Lucile's sympathy—the surest way to reach her heart. Ellen was not at school at the opening of the term. As Lucile was dressing for dinner one evening a few nights after her arrival, a maid had knocked at the door and told her that Miss Hobart wished to see her in the study, Miss Hobart's private room, as soon as she was dressed. Lucile, surprised at the summons, finished her toilet hurriedly and hastened down-

stairs. As she approached the study she heard a man's voice speaking and the sound of some one crying softly.

"A new scholar, I expect," she said to herself, and then was astonished to hear Miss Hobart say, coldly:

"It is against my principles to take girls under such circumstances, but if you are quite sure that none will hear of the matter—or will connect my name with it? It would be bad for the school, you understand."

Lucile paused in bewilderment. She realized that a private conversation was being carried on. What ought she to do? She could not intrude upon a private interview, and yet Miss Hobart had sent for her. Before she could decide upon any action, the man's voice spoke again. It was a nice voice, low and kind, with a break in it now and then, almost like a sob.

"There will be no danger of that, Miss Hobart," the voice said. "And Ellen is a dear, docile child. She will give you no trouble, I promise. Is it not so, child?"

"If my father would only speak to me like that," thought Lucile with a lump in her throat.

She turned away from the door so as to be out of hearing of the voices and walked the length

of the hall once or twice until the sound of moving chairs in the study told her that the interview was at an end. She approached the door again just as it opened and a tall, sad-faced man appeared, followed by Miss Hobart and a girl, small and slender, with reddened eyelids, whom Lucile rightly guessed to be the new scholar.

"Ah, Lucile," said Miss Hobart, perceiving her. Then, turning to the gentleman, "This, Mr. Metcalfe, will be Ellen's room-mate, Lucile Wentworth. Lucile, will you take Ellen to her room, and make her feel at home?"

Mr. Metcalfe greeted Lucile very kindly, then with a last tender farewell to his daughter, and one or two whispered words, he hurried away, leaving Lucile and Ellen facing each other in the hall.

As the days passed, Ellen tried to appear cheerful with the other girls, but Lucile felt sure that she was not happy. "I wonder if she's lost her mother," she puzzled. "But then, I should think she'd be wearing black."

She knew that her room-mate cried herself to sleep every night, but she was certain that Ellen did not know that she knew, and, much as she longed to sympathize with her, did not like to speak. Some time after Ellen had come, Lucile

was wakened one night by the sound of violent sobs followed by several disjointed sentences from the other bed, that told her that Ellen was talking in her sleep.

"Oh, Tom, Tom, say you didn't," cried Ellen, sitting up in bed and reaching out her arms, "Tom, think of mamma, poor mamma!"

"Ellen, Ellen," called Lucile, springing out of bed and running across the room. "Wake up, you're dreaming!"

She shook the sleeping girl, who started up in alarm, rubbing her eyes and asking what was the matter.

"You were having a bad dream," answered Lucile, "and talking."

"Oh," cried Ellen quickly, "did I say—what did I say?"

"Nothing much. Something about 'Tom' and your mother. Have you lost your mother, Ellen?" she asked softly.

"No," answered Ellen, pressing Lucile's sympathetic hand in the darkness. "But I—I'm not very happy just now. Tom's my brother," she added a little stiffly.

Lucile hesitated a moment, not knowing how far she might extend her sympathy.

"I'm awfully sorry for you," she said at

length. "It is dreadful to be homesick. Would you—wouldn't you like to 'bump' beds?" she asked eagerly.

"Oh, ever so much! It would help me to feel near somebody. And if I ever talk in my sleep again, or anything, you'll punch me hard till I wake up, won't you?"

"Yes, I will," agreed Lucile, "and we'll bump the beds the first thing to-morrow, won't we. We're going to have lots of good times here, don't you think so?" she asked. "The girls all seem nice and jolly."

"Yes, but I like you best, and I'm glad that you're my room-mate," replied Ellen, frankly.

"Oh, thanks. I like you awfully too. We'll be chums, won't we? It's worth my having to sleep alone here for two or three nights after I came to have you for a chum," responded Lucile cordially. "But I must fly back to my own bed now, or Miss Hobart will hear us talking and come up. She's got awfully sharp ears."

"All right. But when the beds are bumped we can talk as late as we like, can't we?"

"Yes, indeed. Good night, Ellen, please don't cry any more."

"I won't. I feel much better already. Good night, Lucile."

And so began a friendship that, like many formed at school, was to last these two girls all their lives. Although Lucile thought often of those words that she had overheard in Miss Hobart's study, and wondered what Ellen had been dreaming that night about her brother, and what it was that she wanted him to say that he "didn't," whether it was something he had said or done, still, she respected Ellen's silence on the subject and never asked her any questions.

Neither, in her turn, did she confide in Ellen about her own home life, though she soon grew to dread the weekly letters from her father, fearing that each would give her the date of his wedding. Her father's wedding! She flushed with shame at the very thought. Lucile had given very little heed in her short, careless life, to romance or sentiment. She had always considered that love and marriage belonged to young people—not to men with daughters almost grown up, though people had told her that her father was a mere boy when he married her mother and he was still a young looking man. A stepmother was not at all to Lucile's liking at any time, but that Miss Granville should become her father's wife made her both unhappy and indignant.

She was greatly relieved therefore, when a letter came from Mr. Wentworth to announce that the wedding was not to take place until Christmas time.

"This will enable you to be at home for it," wrote her father, "but at the same time it will not interrupt your studies by taking you away from school during term time."

Miss Claire Granville, when informed by Mr. Wentworth that he wished his daughter to be present at their wedding, had advised this course. She had guessed, from her future husband's reluctance to speak of his daughter, that Lucile was not prepared to receive her new mother favorably, and was resolved to do everything in her power to win over the girl whose father, she feared, had never understood or appreciated her.

Miss Granville's happiness had come to her rather late in life. Left early an orphan, her life spent among unsympathetic relations, her girlhood had been dull and dreary. Her longing for the careless freedom that belongs by right to childhood, had made her singularly sympathetic with young people, and her heart yearned toward the daughter of the man she loved, and whose love she desired so eagerly to win. That this would prove no easy task she realized, when Mr. Went-

worth described to her Lucile's manner of receiving the news of his second marriage.

"I understand and appreciate how she feels in regard to my taking her mother's place, Geoffrey," she had said, "and you must do justice to the finer feelings that led to such thoughts. You see," she added with a smile, "she does not know me yet, and so cannot know that I do not mean to step into her mother's place, but to make up to her for the loss of that mother-love, as far as I can." She of course was not aware of the incident which Lucile had witnessed of the ejected tenants, and of her consequent judgment of their landlady. If she had been, she would have understood what made the task she was cheerfully undertaking, so difficult.

"I want to do my best for your little girl, Geoffrey," she went on. "My heart yearns toward her already. I think perhaps she needs more love in her life, dear. Let us have the wedding at Christmas time. In that way we will not only do away with the feeling on her part that she is being brought home to attend it, but perhaps the spirit of the time and season will soften her heart and she can be made to look upon me less in the light of a usurper."

And so the news of the postponement was

conveyed to Lucile. Her father's letter was cold and of distant tone, stating merely the facts and their reason. As soon as lessons were over, she hurried with it to Miss Jones's room. The governess had become very dear to Lucile during this new life. At first Lucile had turned to her because hers was the only familiar presence among a host of strangers, and then she grew fond of her for her own sake. Miss Jones was always sympathetic and responsive, whatever Lucile's mood, and they had many long talks together. These talks principally concerned the restraining of the girl's unfortunate temper, which the unaccustomed strictness of school discipline had caused to flame forth on several occasions in such words and actions as to mortify Lucile herself, when her passion was over, and which shocked and grieved Miss Hobart. Indeed, Lucile found that her temper was to prove the one drawback to a happy life at school, and when Miss Jones pointed out to her that this was all the more reason for her conquering it, so that she need not stand in the way of her own happiness, Lucile had groaned, but promised to try to curb her unruly tongue.

"It's going to be awfully hard, Miss Jones," she said, dismally. "It's all right between times,

you know, and I can make all the good resolutions in the world. But when something happens to provoke me, why, I'm just all in a fury before I have time to think, and then—why, I don't want not to be mad. I just want to say all the horrid, hateful things I can think of, and it seems impossible that I can ever get so that I'll be sorry or ashamed of them."

" 'When angry, count one hundred,' " said Miss Jones, quoting the good old proverb.

"Gracious!" ejaculated Lucile, laughing. "I'm afraid that if I did that, I'd never have time for lessons or anything, but would just be counting all the time. But I will try, Miss Jones," she promised.

And so on this afternoon, when she carried her letter to the English teacher's room, she only bemoaned the fact that her holidays would be spoiled, and said nothing at all about the cold, formal tone of her father's words, which formerly would have sent her into a storm of angry resentment and wounded feelings.

"I'm rather glad that it's not to be until then, Miss Jones," she said. "For you know I thought it was to be some time next month, and father said he was going to make me come home for it, and then I should have had to tell the girls."

CHAPTER VIII

A BAD SCRAPE

LUCILE came dashing into her room in a perfect whirlwind of temper, and slammed the door behind her with a vehemence that made Ellen, who was putting away her clean clothes in the bottom drawer, start and look around in a fright.

"Why, Lucile," she cried, "whatever in the world is the matter! What has happened?" Then she caught sight of her room-mate's red, angry face and stopped.

Lucile went over to the window and stood looking out into the street. The school was located in rather a new part of the town, on a street that if one followed it far enough, led directly to the White House. It was a beautiful glimpse that ended the street and one upon which Lucile feasted her eyes whenever she went out. She looked upon an open square with the leaves on the trees turning to crimson and gold, and the snowy pillars of the Presidential Mansion gleaming through them, while behind, like the simple,

true, majestic life of the hero whose memory it bespoke, rose the straight white shaft of the Washington monument. There was a great charm to Lucile in living in the National Capital. She had already visited such of the Government buildings as are open to the public, and had wandered through the few rooms of the White House to which visitors are admitted. She gazed in rapt interest and awe after every great man that was pointed out to her on the street, and longed ardently for a glimpse of the President.

But at the present moment Lucile was not thinking of any of these things, was not even conscious that she was gazing down into the street, where, if she could only have known it, the British Ambassador was at that instant driving by in his carriage ! Her mind was filled with her own angry thoughts, as was clearly shown to Ellen by the quick tapping of her foot and the nervous working of her hands. But Ellen had seen her friend in this state before and knew that the best way to act was to wait until Lucile herself chose to speak. So she returned to the bureau and busied herself in silence.

At last Lucile turned and began to pace the floor excitedly.

“Such an unjust thing I never heard of in all

my life!" she blurted out. "The old ninny! She needn't flatter herself that I was thinking about her, anyway. As if I'd give her that much notice! Mimic her, indeed, Ugh! Ellen, did you ever hear of such thing! I declare I——"

"I haven't heard of anything yet," interposed Ellen mildly. "And you'd better get your clean clothes put away, Lucile, or the dressing-bell will ring, first thing you know, and you'll get marked."

"Marked! What do I care for all the marks mademoiselle chooses to give me! Humph! there's no use in trying to keep things tidy for her prying cat-eyes. She marks those she doesn't like and her favorites can keep their things looking like anything with never a word. Marks! indeed!" And seizing the pile of linen that lay upon her bed, ready to be placed in the drawers, Lucile strewed them broadcast about the room.

"Oh, Lucile, Lucile, what are you doing! The things will all be spoiled!" cried Ellen in dismay.

"I don't care. Mademoiselle needn't think I care for her old marks!"

"Well, because you happen to be angry with mademoiselle is no reason why you should get your clean clothes all mussed and not fit to wear,"

said Ellen calmly, going down on her knees to gather up the maltreated garments.

This action brought Lucile back to herself.

"I'm not going to have you waiting on me, anyway," she declared. "Just stop this minute. I'll pick 'em up."

"No, let me help. And while we're putting them away you can tell me what's the matter—if you want."

"Of course I want, you dear old goose. I forgot you didn't know already. Most of the girls do, worse luck, and those that didn't hear will be told by the others. That's the horrid part of it; to have it made public that way." And Lucile's face flushed again at the recollection of the scene.

"What was it?" asked Ellen, arranging the handkerchiefs in neat little piles after her own tidy fashion.

"Oh, it was mademoiselle, the old thing! I declare, it's too silly! I'd laugh if it didn't make me so hopping at the very idea of such a thing. Nobody but that conceited little Frenchwoman could have gotten such a notion into her head!

"Well, you remember the other day in English class, when we were having written review, and I finished before the rest? You know I had a piece of paper in my book, and just for fun,

while I was waiting for the bell to ring, I took the paper and tore it out into the shape of a pair of lorgnettes, and pretended to be reading through them. Miss Jones saw me distinctly, and didn't say a word till Hetty Clarke giggled, and then she said she was afraid that I was disturbing the class. So I shut them up in the book again and forgot all about them.

"You know that was ages ago. Well, to-day in study hour—while you were practising, it was—I opened my rhetoric to look up something, and there lay those lorgnettes. I took them up and looked through them around at the girls, and made Hetty giggle again. You know mademoiselle had charge of study hour this afternoon. She heard Hetty giggle and looked up before I could pop the things away out of sight. She was mad and tapped on her desk and said, "Young ladies, attention!" Lucile mimicked the French teacher's tone with such exactness that Ellen could not help smiling.

"Well, that's no more than Miss Jones did," she remarked.

"Ah, but wait. Of course I didn't mind being called to order. I'm used to it. I just went on with my studying and used the paper for a book-mark. But the old stupid wasn't satisfied. She

watched me for a minute and then said: 'Mees Lucile, w'at ess dat t'ing wa't you 'ave in your hand?' 'A piece of paper, mademoiselle,' I replied as politely as I could, for I was getting cross. She asked to see it and I held it up. All the girls had to giggle. I don't know why, it wasn't any of their affair. Then mademoiselle began to cry and would you believe it! You never can guess, it's so silly and far away from anything that had entered my head. She said I was making fun of her! And holding her up to ridicule before the girls! The idea of it, Ellen. Just because she wears eyeglasses! Did you ever hear anything so silly?"

"It was rather far-fetched," admitted Ellen. "What did you do?"

"Do! I just said; 'Nonsense, I wasn't thinking of you, one way or the other,' and turned my back on her."

"Oh, Lucile, that was rude!"

"I don't care. What can she expect when she acts like that? None of the girls will have any respect for a teacher that behaves like a baby. Well, she sniveled a few minutes and then asked me if I had anything to say. I said 'no' and went on pretending to study. If she'd been civil, Ellen, and had called me up and asked me

about it privately, the way Miss Jones would have done, it'd have been all right. But, yelling out at me like that, so all the girls would hear, don't you think it looked like picking a quarrel?"

"It certainly wasn't very nice of her," said Ellen. "What did she do then?"

"Oh, then she got madder still, and said she'd have to report me to Miss Hobart. I asked what in the world she had to report, and she called me impudent. That did make me furious, and just then the bell rang and I flew out of the room without waiting to be dismissed. So now I suppose I'm in for it." And Lucile sighed, for it was just after her promise to Miss Jones to guard her tongue more carefully, and she was afraid that the English teacher would misjudge her when an account of this new trouble should come to her ears. Lucile was too proud to go to Miss Jones and explain the true facts of the case. Neither would she go to mademoiselle, as Ellen tried to persuade her to do, and endeavor to explain away the misunderstanding.

"A few words would make it all right," pleaded Ellen, "and then there needn't be any scenes. Scenes are so—so uncomfortable!"

"Don't I know that!" groaned Lucile. "But it was mademoiselle who made the scene to-day;

and she can just be the one to settle it. Anyhow, the girls know I wasn't doing it to make fun of her, and I'll explain it to Miss Hobart, if she does report me. But apologize I never will!" And Lucile grew angry again. "I'll get even with her too, somehow! Imitate her indeed! I'll pay her back for this, the silly stupid!" She stamped her foot.

A knock at the door checked further speech. A maid appeared with the request that Lucile go at once to Miss Hobart's study.

"Then she has reported me!" exclaimed Lucile. "I didn't think she would, really. Well, I must go down, and I'll just let Miss Hobart know what I think of false accusations, made in public that way."

She started to leave the room, but Ellen ran after her and detained her.

"Oh, Lucile, please don't go feeling that way," she pleaded. "Be quiet and reasonable at least. Miss Hobart will be lots easier on you," she urged.

But Lucile shook off her hand impatiently and ran hastily down-stairs and into the study. She found mademoiselle there, in tears, and Miss Hobart looking stern and annoyed.

"I hope that you have come prepared to ap-

ologize to mademoiselle for the way in which you hurt her feelings this afternoon, and for your impertinence and rudeness to her," said Miss Hobart, regarding Lucile's flushed face coldly.

Lucile frowned and bit her lip to keep back a torrent of angry words.

"I am sorry that I answered mademoiselle rudely," she said after a pause.

"And for hurting her feelings? For—for ridiculing her before the girls?"

"Miss Hobart, I didn't do any such thing!" burst out Lucile, unable to restrain herself. "I had made those paper things several days ago, just for fun, and had forgotten all about them. And then I found them again to-day in my rhetoric and put them up as a joke. Hetty giggled, but I took them right down, and there wasn't much disorder. And," she added, turning to the French teacher, "I assure mademoiselle that she was not in my mind—nothing was further away from my thoughts at the time!"

The girl's mocking tone brought a fresh burst of tears from the foolish little Frenchwoman, and provoked Miss Hobart farther.

"Such a tone only adds insult to injury, Lucile," she said freezingly. "I see that you are in no mood to make reparation for the wrong you have

done mademoiselle. You may retire to your own room until you can come to me in a better spirit."

"But, Miss Hobart," exclaimed Lucile, astonished, "don't you understand that I wasn't making fun of her? I really——"

Just then Miss Jones knocked at the door and entered with a package of books.

"The copies of——" she began and then stopped. Mademoiselle's tears and Lucile's red cheeks told their own story. She was about to retreat when Lucile turned to her appealingly.

"Oh, Miss Jones," she begged, "won't you please explain to Miss Hobart that I didn't mean to make fun of mademoiselle with those old paper lorgnettes. Don't you know, I made them in English class a long time ago, and forgot all about them."

Miss Jones paused, embarrassed. She did not feel justified in interfering, but how could she go and leave Lucile when she had appealed to her for aid?

She looked to Miss Hobart for permission to speak, and, as the principal bowed a silent assent, she told what she knew regarding Lucile and the paper toy.

"I am quite sure that Lucile's action in study hour was merely thoughtless," she finished, "and

I do hope that mademoiselle will not feel hurt. For," she added, "you know I wear glasses too, mademoiselle, and as Lucile wore the paper lorgnettes first in my class, I am really the one who should be offended."

Mademoiselle, after a few more tears and voluble protestations in French, accepted this view of the subject, and Lucile escaped with a reprimand for losing her temper, a condescending handshake of forgiveness from mademoiselle, and a long lecture from Miss Hobart for thoughtlessly wounding the sensitive little Frenchwoman's feelings.

Lucile mentally classed mademoiselle's feelings as "sentimental fiddlesticks" and held to her resolve to "pay her back," as she expressed it.

Her opportunity soon came. Miss Hobart was called to New York on business, to be gone for several days, and left Miss Jones and mademoiselle, (the two resident teachers), in joint charge of the school.

One Saturday afternoon Lucile came into her room, carrying a big package and looking very mysterious. Mary Harrison, one of the most mischievous girls in the school and Lucile's boon companion in pranks, was with her. Ellen looked up from her book with a yawn.

"What's up, girls—any sort of a lark?" she asked.

It was a dismal November day, threatening rain. The girls had been prevented from taking their daily walk and so were ripe for any mischief.

"Oh, the greatest sort of lark," answered Lucile in an eager whisper. "Only you must keep it secret. Is the door locked, Mary?"

Mary tried the door and nodded. Then Lucile put down the package she carried and untied the cord.

"Look at those!" she exclaimed in elation.

• "Those" were a complete set of men's clothes.

"Why, where in the world did you get them?" ejaculated Ellen, while Mary and Lucile went into peals of laughter at her astonished face.

"They're Mary's brother's," said Lucile as soon as she could recover breath. "She brought them in her trunk in case Miss Hobart would allow us to dress up for tableaux and things. Now, listen. I'm going to dress up in them, and put on your blue glasses, Ellen. Then I'll take a book, sneak around by the alley to the front door and ask for mademoiselle, pretending I'm a book agent. So I'll fool her to pay her back for that stupid lorgnette affair."

"Oh, what fun!" exclaimed Ellen, jumping up and clapping her hands. "You'll make a splendid man, Lucile, only I wish you had a mustache."

Hastily, and suppressing their merriment as well as they could the two girls assisted Lucile into the masculine attire and tucked her hair up out of sight beneath the gray crush hat which was pulled well down over her eyes to shade her face as much as possible. The smoked glasses completed a very clever disguise, but Ellen still regretted the mustache.

"It would put just the finishing touch," she said, standing back and surveying her friend. "And—oh, I have it, of course!"

Seizing the scissors she snipped off an end of one of her own pretty braids and with the aid of the mucilage brush soon had Lucile's upper lip decorated with an artistically curled mustache.

"Splendid, splendid!" cried Mary, clapping her hands excitedly. "Why, Ellen, how did you ever think of it? You've helped us out famously, and I was afraid to have Lucile let you into the scheme, for fear you'd wet-blanket our fun."

"Isn't she perfect!" answered Ellen. "Lucile, would you know yourself?"

"I don't believe I should, really," declared Lucile, surveying herself in the glass. "Now what book shall I take? I must hurry or it will be dark."

The girls rummaged their small store of books until a new looking copy of Lamb's "Tales from Shakespeare," with no one's name written in it, was found, and then Lucile, her disguise concealed beneath a long rain cloak, was smuggled down the back stairs, Mary going ahead to reconnoiter. They slipped out through the deserted kitchen, the cook being in her own room at this hour of the day, as the girls well knew. At the gate, Mary and Ellen took the cloak, and, pausing an instant to watch the masculine figure striding down the alley, scurried back to the house and up-stairs to await developments.

Lucile made her way around to Sixteenth street, and approaching the front door at a brisk walk, rang the bell and asked to see mademoiselle. The Frenchwoman went down to the drawing-room, all unsuspecting, and greeted the good-looking young book-agent with gentle courtesy.

Things were going splendidly. Mademoiselle had become almost convinced that the book was the very thing for the young ladies, and was led

to the point of purchasing one on her own responsibility, in the absence of her superior, when, to Lucile's horror, the front door opened and Miss Hobart's voice was heard in the hall.

Miss Hobart! What in the world could have brought her back two days before the time set for her return! Was ever anything so unfortunate! Lucile stopped in the middle of a speech, and held her breath in sheer terror, expecting Miss Hobart to step into the room at any moment. But no. After a few words to the maid, Lucile heard her pass down the hall, and up the stairs. Now for escape!

"If madame does not want the book," she said, reaching out her hand for the volume mademoiselle still held, "I will call again sometime when Madame Hobart is in."

"She haf jus' return," replied mademoiselle, rising, "and if monsieur will pardon—I will take the book, the most excellent book, to her to look upon."

"Oh, no, no," replied the supposed agent hurriedly. "Don't bother her if she's just back from a journey. I—I will call again."

But mademoiselle was politely insistent, and to Lucile's despair, departed with the volume. Well, there was nothing for it but to escape

without the book, since she could not take it with her, and with a thankful recollection that there was no tell-tale name in it, Lucile scarcely waited until the sound of mademoiselle's footsteps had passed the turn in the stairs before she bolted.

She walked as rapidly as she dared without risk of attracting attention on the street, and when the alley was reached, she fairly flew along it to where Mary and Ellen were waiting, in terrified uncertainty, at the back gate. They had heard Miss Hobart return, and in a wild state of dread at the possible discovery of their prank, had rushed down to screen Lucile's entrance—if she succeeded in escaping.

In silence the three darted up the rear stairs and tip-toed through the halls until the safe harbor of their room was reached, when, the door securely locked, they sank down upon whatever was nearest at hand and gazed at one another, overcome by the narrowness of their escape.

"Whatever did you do when you heard Miss Hobart's voice in the hall?" asked Ellen at length. "How did you keep from giving it all away?"

"I'd have screamed or giggled or something," said Mary. "Do tell us what mademoiselle said about the book?"

"She was terribly stupid and funny about it. But here, help me off with these things. I'm quaking yet at the chance of getting caught," answered Lucile, tugging at her clothes.

"Where is the book? I hope you didn't drop it on the street," asked Mary anxiously, as she applied hot water to the obstinately clinging mustache.

"Worse than that," replied Lucile with a groan caused partly by pain, as Mary tugged harder, and partly in remembrance of the chance of detection in the captured book. "Madoiselle would take it to show to Miss Hobart though I was most un-agent-like in my fears of disturbing her. I almost grabbed it out of her hand, but she sailed out of the room in that grande duchesse manner of hers, with some polite speech about not keeping monsieur waiting long. It was my only chance of escape, so I took it."

"But the book! We'll surely be found out!" gasped Mary and Ellen in dismay.

"Miss Hobart will suspect something at once, when she hears of an agent's trying to sell 'Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare' as a new book," groaned Ellen.

"And her suspicions will be changed into

sureness when she goes down and finds the bird flown," added Mary. "Oh, girls, whatever shall we do! Do you suppose we shall be expelled?"

"Pooh!" said Lucile, hurriedly slipping into her own clothes and pulling down her hair while Mary rolled the tell-tale garments into a bundle. "There isn't any name in the book, and even if Miss Hobart does suspect, she can't possibly know which girl did it."

"And she wouldn't be mean enough to go about asking each girl separately," added Mary.

"I don't know, though," pursued Lucile, her momentary courage fading, "Miss Hobart will probably pounce right on me, taking it for granted that I'm the guilty one. She told me the time we put the wet sponge in Hetty's bed that I was at the bottom of all the mischief done in the school."

The words were hardly out of Lucile's mouth when all three were startled by a low rap at the door.

CHAPTER IX

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

THE girls sat staring at the door in blank dismay, each forgetting to give the required invitation to enter. That their recent prank had been discovered and the knock on the door was a summons to justice, they had no doubt. Lucile groaned and began to wish that she had not dressed up. Mary's words, "shall we be expelled?" flashed through her mind. What would her father say if she were to be sent home in disgrace?

The rap came again, followed by Miss Jones's voice :

"Lucile, Lucile, are you there? May I come in?"

The girls gave a great sigh of relief as Lucile jumped up to open the door. But when Miss Jones entered she carried the ill-fated book in her hand!

She did not say anything, but with a grave face, laid the book on the table. She read the

unasked question in the three pairs of eyes turned upon her and opening the volume, took from it a small bookmark.

"I worked that for Lucile last Christmas," she said quietly.

There was a pause and then Lucile said in a hurt tone that cut Miss Jones to the heart :

"And you—you told on me !"

"No, Lucile," she answered gently. "You surely know I would not do that. Of course Miss Hobart guessed at once that a prank was being played. You all expected that?" she asked, pausing to scrutinize the three downcast faces.

The girls nodded.

"We didn't know she was coming home to-day," mumbled Lucile.

"She examined the book," went on Miss Jones. "There was no name in it, but she found this mark. It seems that she had seen you have it in your Bible, Lucile. She sent for me, and, without disclosing any of the facts, showed it to me, and asked me if it didn't belong to you. I replied that I had given it to you myself; then she asked if I thought it likely that any other girl in the school had a similar one. I knew that to be impossible and showed her where I had

worked my initials in the corner. Then, with some assistance from mademoiselle, she told me the story—the disgraceful story!

At this juncture Lucile took heart. She had been watching Miss Jones closely, and she thought—she wasn't at all sure, but she thought that she detected a suppressed smile; a suggestive twitching of the lips that she was familiar with of old.

"I did what I could to soften the enormity of the offense," went on Miss Jones, "and then I was despatched to return the property to its owner and to request her presence in the study."

Lucile rose at once.

"You're a hero, Miss Jones. Bye-bye. I'm off before my courage fails."

"But wait," cried Mary and Ellen together. "Of course we're going too. We are as much to blame as you."

Miss Jones did not look surprised to hear of Mary's share in the proceeding, though she did own to some astonishment at Ellen's being concerned in it.

"Indeed, I did as much as any of them," declared Ellen bravely. "But Miss Jones, do you think Miss Hobart will punish us very severely? I mean, expel us? For," she said very gravely,

"I.—I shouldn't like anything of that sort to happen, it would be so hard for mamma and papa. I can't explain," she added, her eyes filling with tears, "but it will be harder for me to have that sort of disgrace than for you others."

Lucile suddenly remembered the cold words that she had overheard Miss Hobart speak on the night of Ellen's arrival, and then the girl's queer dream about her brother. She squeezed Ellen's hand and exclaimed impulsively :

"Don't you come at all, Ellen. Why should you? No one would ever think of the dear little 'Mouse' having anything to do with such a scandalous performance as this. Mary and I can easily bear all the blame, can't we, Mary. We're used to it and it's all that is expected of us. Besides," she added with an attempt at gaiety, "Miss Hobart would be quite overcome at the idea of your being mixed up in it. You really ought to spare her any more shocks at present."

"No," said Ellen determinedly, "I'll take my share of the blame. Am I not right, Miss Jones?"

"You must let your conscience decide that point for you," replied Miss Jones seriously.

And as Lucile saw that Ellen was resolved not

to be shielded from the consequences of her part in the prank, she forebore to urge her further.

"Girls," said Miss Jones, "may I say just a word or two before you go? Miss Hobart is both shocked and indignant that such a thing should have happened in her school, and she may be a little severe with you. Will you all please try to take whatever she says to you, quietly and respectfully?"

Lucile, knowing that the words were meant for her, though addressed to all, went over to where her teacher was standing and said in a low voice :

"Miss Jones, I'll be as meek as a lamb. I broke my promise to you the other day, I know, and got very angry about nothing. To-day I'll be doubly patient to make up."

"Even if mademoiselle should—should be inclined to exaggerate your offense a little?" asked Miss Jones wistfully.

"Even if mademoiselle exaggerates my offense to the height of her silly little imagination, I promise to hold my tongue," answered Lucile solemnly.

The three girls proceeded down-stairs in an abashed silence, and entered the presence of Miss Hobart.

From what Lucile told Miss Jones afterward, the scene must have been an exciting one, and very trying to Lucile's temper. That she had kept her promise to Miss Jones and had held her tongue, the English teacher was assured by Miss Hobart herself. Lucile had made an honest, complete confession of the prank; her form of revenge upon mademoiselle for the ill-feeling of a few days previous, and how the other girls had entered into the scheme for the fun of it, Mary lending the clothes.

There were tears and words of repentance and Lucile apologized heartily to poor, incensed little mademoiselle for the deception that she had practised upon her. Then Miss Hobart impressed upon their minds the impropriety of the act, as well as the seriousness of it, as really endangering the reputation of the school, should it become known. Whereupon the three volunteered a promise of strict secrecy which promise they kept faithfully. Miss Hobart dismissed them, restricting several of the school privileges as punishments, and imposing certain tasks to be fulfilled during recreation hour on Saturday. The girls felt indeed, that they had gotten off very easily, and Lucile consoled the others for the loss of their Saturday afternoon with the assurance

that Miss Jones would make the new lessons as interesting and easy as possible, as she certainly did.

Of course all the other pupils marveled greatly that the three no longer joined their Saturday games, and seemed to have no time for play, but would disappear with books into Miss Jones' room soon after luncheon. That they were being punished for some misdeed was speedily guessed, but what that misdeed was, not all the asking, pleading, teasing, bribing of the combined school could get out of them.

And soon they ceased to nag the penitents, anticipation of the approaching holidays driving all other thoughts out of their heads.

"Only five more days," said Ellen one night as they were getting ready for bed. "Are you glad, Lucile?"

Lucile thought the question rather a strange one, considering how eager a schoolgirl generally is for holiday time, but she answered frankly:

"No, I'm not. Why? Have I shown it?"

"I didn't think you talked as if you were awfully glad—not in the way you do about things you particularly want to happen," answered Ellen hesitatingly. "I'm not glad either," she added, as if moved to speak.

"I'm so sorry," said Lucile softly, and Ellen felt and appreciated the sincere sympathy expressed in those few words.

The two girls finished their preparations in silence and then lay down side by side in the beds put close together after Lucile's fashion of "bumping." Lucile lay quite still in the dark, fighting with her loneliness, the longing to take her friend into her confidence, battling with her pride at discussing home affairs with an outsider. But the longing conquered at last and she sat straight up in bed suddenly, exclaiming :

"Ellen, I've just got to tell, and talk to you about it. Miss Jones knows, but somehow I feel as if she didn't see it in the same light I do. But you will, I know, for you have your own mother, and of course you will understand."

"I'm afraid I don't quite see," said Ellen in a puzzled voice.

"No, of course you don't with me rambling along in my usual wild fashion, without explaining. Ellen, I'm going to have a stepmother!"

If she'd been going to have the smallpox she could not have announced the fact in a more tragic voice. She went on :

"My father's going to be married again. Isn't it awful and—and foolish!" she finished

with a shamed laugh. "Oh, Ellen, I feel so badly about it!" and tumbling across the pillow, she threw herself into her friend's comforting arms and sobbed out the grief restrained for all these months. Ellen did not know what to say and was discreetly silent, smoothing Lucile's roughened hair gently.

"It's—it's to be this Christmas time," sobbed Lucile at length. "And that's the reason I don't want to go home. I—I just loathe the thought of it."

"But, Lucile, maybe she'll be somebody nice that will be good to you and love you."

"Oh, but she isn't!" exclaimed Lucile quickly. "She's selfish and hard-hearted and cruel."

"Oh, dear, are you sure? Do you know her?"

"I know her name."

"Then how can you be sure! You may be mistaken."

"No, I'm not mistaken," declared Lucile positively. "You see—" she went on, and then stopped. She could not tell Ellen about that poor family. No one must ever know how really dreadful Miss Granville was.

She fell back upon her other reasons.

"Well but Ellen, it isn't altogether that. It's the thought of anybody's living at home in

mamma's place. Just think how you'd feel to have some stranger coming into your home in your mother's place!" And she sat up in bed again.

Ellen's face grew pale in the dark.

"Oh, Lucile don't!" she cried in a pained voice. "I love my mother so!"

"Well," said Lucile warmly, "don't you suppose that I love my mother, too? Or at least the memory of her. I don't remember her very well," she added sadly, "I was so little when she died. But I don't want any one to take her place, my dear mamma, any more than you would."

"But, Lucile, it does seem to me a little different," protested Ellen weakly. "My mamma's still alive, you know, and—and——"

"And mine's in heaven. But she's still my mother, just the same," answered Lucile with a choke in her voice. "No, Ellen, there isn't any difference, and I'm just broken-hearted!"

Ellen was neither old enough nor wise enough to say, as Miss Granville herself had expressed it, that the new mother would not try to take the other's place, but only to make up to her for the loss.

"I'm so sorry for you," was all that she could think of to say, and she cried a little with Lucile.

"I wish I could tell you what it is that makes me unhappy," she said after a while, longing to make a return confidence. "But I mustn't speak about it, Lucile, not even to you. But oh, my heart is so heavy. And Christmas is going to be dreadfully gloomy at home this year."

"Never mind," said Lucile more cheerfully, finding comfort in misery's company, "we can think of each other at any rate, and let's write every day, shall we?"

"Oh, I should like that!" cried Ellen eagerly. "It will be almost the same as being together, won't it?"

"Yes, and after all, the holidays will only last two weeks. I'm glad Miss Hobart didn't grant the girls' petition to make it three weeks, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am," agreed Ellen. "But wouldn't the other girls be horrified to hear us talk like this. They all wanted the three weeks so," she added with a little laugh.

"I don't care, and I do hope that dreadful wedding won't happen until after Christmas day, so that I can get some pleasure out of my gifts."

Ellen sighed. The sadness in her home-going was not one undesirable day; it was the con-

sequences, rather than anticipation of unhappiness that had brought sorrow to her home, and would make what should be the gladdest time of the year, instead, one almost of mourning. Lucile heard the sigh and asked softly:

"I don't want to seem to pry, or—or anything like that, but Ellen, dear, is it that somebody has died?"

"Oh, Lucile, it's worse than that!" and poor Ellen's eyes filled with tears.

"It couldn't be worse than that, Ellen dear," exclaimed Lucile eagerly "because when people die, it's just the end. You can't bring them back again and everything's dreadful. But when it's something else, why, you know there's always a chance of its coming out right bye and bye, and everything being nice again."

This hopeful speech cheered Ellen's sore heart.

"How I wish I could tell you about it," she said fervently. "Perhaps I can, sometime. Anyhow, thank you for what you said. It's helped me lots already."

"Has it really? Oh, I'm so glad!"

"And you don't mind my not telling you? I mean, you're not hurt?—after your telling me about your trouble?"

"No, indeed. I'm thankful to you for listening.

It was a comfort to me to talk to some one about my trouble. I only wish I could have made you understand about it better."

Just then a soft step was heard in the hall outside their door and Miss Hobart's low, quiet voice penetrated the darkness.

"Girls don't you know that you are breaking the rules by talking after hours? It is now a quarter of ten. You must report to mademoiselle in the morning for fifteen minutes talking after the last bell."

"Yes, Miss Hobart," replied two reluctant voices, for the rule against talking after "lights out" was strict and the punishment, one page of French translation for every five minutes.

But after Miss Hobart had gone, Ellen leaned across and whispered :

"I do understand and I'm sure it will all come right, Lucile, dear. I've known lots of girls with stepmothers and they were all lovely. Just forget about the part that hurts you—about her taking your mother's place—and try to think that she's an aunt or something who's come to love you and help you."

"Oh," said Lucile, "I wish I could manage to think that!"

"Of course you can. Good night, Lucile."

“Good night, Ellen,” replied Lucile, bending across to respond to her friend’s kiss.

But when she crept back into her own bed, there was a frown on Lucile’s brow. “How could I think of her as some one coming to love and help me, when I know that about her,” she thought scornfully.

CHAPTER X

HER FATHER'S WEDDING

WHEN Lucile arrived at home for her holidays and found the house in a turmoil with the preparations for its new mistress, all her bitter resentment at the new state of things rose up within her.

The wedding was to take place on the thirty-first, her father told her, at eight in the evening, and a large reception was to follow at Mr. Wentworth's house. Lucile received his announcement without comment, which on the whole was a relief to her father. She was to get a new dress for the occasion, he told her, and Lucile missing Miss Jones' kind counsel, appealed to Mrs. Wharton to assist her in choosing a suitable frock.

Mrs. Wharton helped her to select a white dotted muslin which was to be made in a simple style and worn with ribbons of Lucile's favorite tint of bright pink. Edith thought the dress very pretty and wondered why Lucile did not seem more pleased with it. But then, she re-

flected, Lucile never had cared much about what she wore.

Lucile was delighted to see Edith again. In spite of the frequent letters that had been exchanged, they had "perfect volumes" to tell each other, and spent many happy hours in Edith's cozy room, sewing on Christmas gifts and describing their experiences. Lucile told all about Ellen and how she was going to ask her father's permission to bring her home for a visit in the summer vacation. Edith felt a little pang of jealousy at this new friendship for until now she had always been first in Lucile's heart. But though they discussed their doings of the past three months very thoroughly, there was one subject that was not touched upon by either—the approaching marriage. Though Lucile had found it comparatively easy, the ice once broken, to discuss the topic with Ellen, she could not bring herself to speak of this change to one whom she had always known so intimately and who knew what her past life had been. She feared Edith's pity.

The bright winter days passed swiftly by and they were, on the whole, very happy ones for Lucile. There were several pleasant gatherings given by her friends in her honor, and Christmas day

itself was a merry one indeed. Her father was more lavish than usual in his gifts, and all of Lucile's friends had remembered her with some dainty token. Ellen sent a book by her favorite author, which, as it happened, Lucile had never read, and as she sat curled up on her comfortable lounge with a box of candy, and read of another's trials, she was thankful that at least her father was not going to send her out among strangers.

"The dear chum wants me to see that worse things can happen to a girl than having a step-mother," she thought, "and so sent this book."

She turned the leaf and burst into a hearty laugh over the bookmark tucked in the back of the volume, that Ellen had slipped in to off-set the seriousness of the gift. The cardboard had a caricature sketch of the two girls in their beds at school, each with a huge nightcap on, and snores in the form of "ughs" written inside of balloons, coming out of their mouths, while the figure of Miss Hobart, with beady eyes and a crooked mouth, stood in the doorway, saying, by means of another balloon: "Young ladies, ten pages of French translation for talking after hours." Ellen had a decided talent for drawing and the sketch was very clever, all the likenesses

being admirable in spite of the exaggeration. Lucile carried the bookmark over to Edith's, both to share with her the fun of it and to show her what Ellen really looked like, for Lucile had no photograph of her friend.

So the time passed until the thirty-first of December, her father's wedding-day, was at hand. Lucile spent most of the day in her own room, refusing to join a skating party of her friends, on the plea of headache. When she came downstairs in the evening, dressed for the church, her white face and heavy eyes bore out the truth of her excuse. Dinner was only the pretense of a meal. The rooms being already arranged for the reception, the father and daughter ate standing beside the buffet in the dining-room. Mr. Wentworth expressed his sorrow at hearing of his daughter's headache and then lapsed into a silent reverie, not observing that Lucile had sent away her plate almost untouched.

"I must start now," he said abruptly, glancing at his watch. "I have arranged for Mrs. Evans to accompany you. You are to call for her in the carriage at a quarter of eight. She will sit next you in church and look after you generally. Good-bye, daughter. Can't you give your old father one word of good-will and a kiss?" he

asked wistfully, coming to where she stood and bending down to press his lips against her hair. Lucile remembered the tone of Mr. Metcalfe's voice when he had said good-bye to Ellen at school, and a sudden rush of tears overflowed her eyes.

"Oh, father, if only you had loved me more!" she sobbed, burying her face in his coat.

The words smote Mr. Wentworth with a sudden pang of remorse but he could not stop then for explanations so, putting his daughter gently away from him, he gave her a hearty pat on the head, saying:

"There, there, child. Father has always loved you. Let me go now, like a good girl." And he hurried away.

Mrs. Evans was the clergyman's wife, a kind, sympathetic old lady who would not expect to be entertained and whom she would not mind seeing her in tears. So when the carriage returned after calling for Mrs. Evans, Lucile climbed in unhesitatingly and they were driven off.

The wedding was very quiet with only a few of Mr. Wentworth's most intimate friends present to witness it. The ceremony was ended and Lucile was walking out of the church behind the

bridal couple, to the strains of Mendelssohn's wedding march, almost before she realized it.

As soon as she reached home again she carried out a resolution made long before, but which she had not mentioned to her father for fear he should forbid it. After the hurried hand-shake with the bride which her natural courtesy demanded, Lucile went up to her own room and locked herself in. Ringing for the maid, she sent her down to tell Mr. Wentworth that her head ached too badly to go down-stairs again. Lucile had made this resolve to remain in her own room, when her father told her of his intention to give a large reception for his wife. She would go to the church; she could not very well stay away without making people talk. But attend a party given for the unwelcome newcomer, she simply would not.

Mr Wentworth was very indignant when Lucile's message was conveyed to him, and was on the point of sending to command her instant presence in the drawing-room, when Mrs. Wentworth interposed.

"Let her stay up-stairs to-night if she wishes, Geoffrey," she said quietly. "It would only turn her more against me to force her now. And she did look as though her head ached badly."

So the message was received with only a cool, "Very well," and Katy retreated before the arrival of the first guest.

Lucile felt a trifle flat as time passed and Katy did not come with the expected summons to her father's side. She had anticipated a pitched battle and had rather been looking forward to the fray. She had not had any idea that her excuse would be accepted. Then a new injury presented itself. She was not wanted. The new mistress preferred to make her entrance into the household without the presence of its sorrowing daughter who could not be expected to rejoice and who might therefore cast a gloom over the gaiety. Yes, that was it. She was not wanted.

The sound of voices and laughter floated up to her from below as she sat in her self-imposed exile. It must be a large party and people seemed to be having a very good time indeed. Shut up in her own room, cut off from the pleasure and gaiety down-stairs and nursing her grievance, it was not a hard task for Lucile to forget the short glimpse she had had of the genial, kind face of her new mother, and to replace it with the old fancied likeness her imagination had conjured up, of a large, proud,

severe-looking woman with haughty manners and a sharp voice, who would order the servants about and endeavor to alter the household arrangements. But she should not order Lucile about!

The girl had made up her mind on that point! Setting her lips at the thought she jumped to her feet and began to pace the room excitedly. This picture of her stepmother had been so firmly impressed and dwelt upon in her mind for so long that it now seemed like a reality. She saw herself scolded and snubbed in her own home, neglected by her father and tyrannized over by her stepmother.

A sudden burst of laughter came up from below. Lucile set her teeth at the sound, her hands working nervously. She forgot that her own act had set her outside that enjoyment.

"I shan't stay here to be treated in any such way," she muttered angrily. "My father can't love me if he brings somebody into the house who laughs and talks with his friends while his only daughter is sitting lonely and suffering, shut up in her own room. No, he doesn't love me. I don't suppose he'd actually turn me out of the house, but she would not hesitate to, just as she turns her poor tenants out into the street when they don't please her, and I'm sure father'd wel-

come any chance to get rid of me. And I'll spare him the trouble of me any longer. I will—I'll run away! I'm big enough now to take care of myself and I'll go away somewhere and earn my own living!"

Quite carried away with this new idea and feeling perfectly justified in her present mood to take the step, Lucile put her resolve into instant practise, without giving her mind time to cool. She slipped hastily into a dark dress and taking her golf cape, she wrapped it closely about her. Putting her purse, which contained a few pennies left from her allowance, and the gold piece her father had given her on Christmas, into her pocket, she opened her door and tip-toed softly out into the hall to reconnoiter. The upper rooms were all deserted, as were, apparently, the halls. As she neared the top of the stairs a faint clatter of dishes told her that the guests were all at supper. Running lightly down the steps she slipped out through the side door unobserved.

Outside it was bitter cold. In the afternoon the snow had thawed slightly, but was now hard frozen again, covering everything with a thin glazing of ice. The keen wind stung her ears and nose and made her regret her speedy exodus

from the warm, comfortable house. She took her way slowly down the driveway, slipping and catching herself, only to slip again, being literally blown along by the fierce wind, that howled mockingly in her ears.

A sudden revulsion of feeling came over her. Why had she come and where was she going? What would people say of her rash act? What, indeed, could she say of it herself? Had her new mother shown signs of doing the dreadful things that she had ascribed to her—or of being the disagreeable woman she had fancied? At least she should have waited until she had some good reason for going away.

But she was too proud to yield at once to her reason, and walked on, though more and more slowly. She had determined to leave her father's house, and she must carry out her resolve. At the gate, however, she paused, hesitated a moment and then turned back. After all, wasn't it a trifle cowardly, (that word was more acceptable to her pride than foolish) to run away from terrors not yet realized? Yes, she would go back and endure patiently and silently all that she could bear; would endure until she could bear no more, and then she would go to her father and tell him, quietly and firmly, that she could not stand to

live under his roof any longer ; that she intended to go out into the world and earn her own living. There, perhaps somewhere among strangers, she would find friends who would love her and be kind to her. She would pack her belongings, and those things that had been her mother's, and would leave, not as a thief in the night, but openly, deliberately, in broad daylight. People who saw her go would say : "There is the poor girl who was driven from home by her cruel stepmother ! " Lucile was quite in an ecstasy of misery as she reached this climax of her imaginary woes, and she turned quickly to retrace her steps. As she approached the corner of the house, intending to re-enter it by the kitchen door, she was suddenly arrested by the sound of voices close by, whispering.

The house formed a small " L " at this side where a one-storied addition had been made to form a store-room. This room jutted out from the main portion of the house and near it grew a clump of lilac bushes. Cautiously peering around the corner Lucile saw two men crouched in the shadow of the bushes, conversing in earnest whispers. She was so close to them that she could hear the faintest tones of their voices.

"The party's pretty nigh over now," one of

the men was saying. "In another hour we can go to work."

"But we mustn't be too quick," cautioned his companion. "Let 'em git well settled in bed first."

"You're sure she's got the jewels here?" asked the first speaker. "It'd be a sell to get in 'nd find nothin'."

"Oh, she's got 'em all right. And we'll make a big haul. He's got all his best silver out for his party."

Lucile listened aghast. These men were plotting robbery; robbery of her father's house! She must give the alarm. She took a stealthy foot-step backwards when one of the men began to speak again, and she paused. It would be better if she could learn more of their plan of action.

"Silver ain't very safe to take nowadays," objected the first speaker, "Besides, you can't never tell if it's solid. I want to get them there jewels. I got a grudge against Miss Granville."

Lucile caught her breath, it was her duty to warn her father. She stepped backward again, cautiously, but in the darkness her foot slipped. A particle of ice snapped under her foot. In the tense stillness of the winter night the crackle resounded with a sharp distinctness.

CHAPTER XI

A NIGHT ADVENTURE

THE two men in the shadow of the lilac bushes sprang forward. Before Lucile could move or utter a cry she felt herself roughly seized and something thrown over her face. She struggled fiercely against her captors, striving to free her arms and jerk away the heavy woolen garment that enfolded her head. Her hands were caught down to her sides in a vise-like grip and the next instant she felt a sharp, stinging blow on her head. Stars flashed in the blackness, her head swam and she sank back inertly. She was conscious of being lifted and carried swiftly, then she knew no more.

When she came to herself again she was lying in a cramped, huddled position, on what, she could not guess at first, for the substance which bore her weight yielded and sank to her every movement. An unreasoning panic seized upon her—vague terrors of quicksands such as she had read of in

books. But the sensation was fleeting. There were no such things as quicksands in the region. Moreover, she could extricate herself easily. She plunged her arm into the mass and held up a handful of the particles against her face. The place was pitch dark and she could see nothing. In raising herself her other arm came in contact with something. She put her hand out. It was a wall. Then in an instant she knew where she was. She had been put into the oat-bin, in the loft of the stable.

Her relief from the uncertainty of the situation was so great that she laughed softly. Then she began slowly to raise herself. The heavy garment that had muffled her face was gone. Nor were her hands tied. The men had evidently not considered such precautions necessary. Her head still ached, and her muscles were all sore and bruised from rough handling. She must have been thrown into the bin with some force.

Her first question was, how long had she been unconscious and was it too late to warn her father? Her second question, how to get back to the house to give the warning, if there were still time?

She rose to her feet and stood erect in the shifting grain. Was the bin full, or nearly empty?

She and Edith knew the loft well, it being one of their favorite pastimes on rainy days to roll in the soft hay and clamber among the bins. If the oat-bin were moderately full, she could easily reach the top and climb over. She stretched her arms, following up the line of the partition, and to her delight felt the edge just above the level of her head. It took but an instant to spring up to the top and lightly down on the other side. Her eyes had become more accustomed to the darkness by this time and she made her way almost unhesitatingly to the stairs and down them. The door at the foot was locked.

This was the first obstacle. In vain she pressed her vigorous young strength against it. The lock would not give. She was afraid to make too much noise for fear the burglars might still be lurking about the stable. She realized the necessity for immediate action, however, and mounted the stairs again, fleetly and silently.

She had thought of the gap in the floor of the loft through which hay was pushed down for the horses. By dropping through this hole she could reach the lower floor of the stable. But would she have the courage to do it.

She hesitated for an instant at the edge of the opening, then, kneeling, she clasped the boards

firmly and let herself down. For an awful moment she hung suspended in the darkness. Beneath her—how close to her she could not tell—came the heavy breathing of a horse. When she released her hold where would she alight? Was she poised over one of the mangers, as she hoped, or would she fall into a stall, to be kicked by the sprawling legs of a frightened horse, startled by the abrupt interruption of his slumbers?

But her arms were beginning to ache with the sustained tension; her hands were losing their grip. Catching her breath in a quick little sob she released her hold and fell—not into a manger, but still better, into an empty stall. She made a hasty investigation. Rubble was standing quietly in his stall, adjoining, but both the other horses were gone. Mr. Wentworth had ordered out the carriage to drive some friends home, but of course Lucile did not know this. She thought that the thieves had stolen the horses.

Passing out of the stall, Lucile made her way to the stable door. It was padlocked on the outside. But that was not discouraging. She hurried across to the harness room and unbolting the window, climbed out through it and stood on the cemented porch of the carriage house.

A turn of the drive and a mass of shrubbery

hid the house from view. Her one fear now was that the two men would see and capture her again. The courage which had upheld her during the moments of action inside the stable now dwindled at the prospect of passing that shadowy mass of bushes, wherein the thieves might be hidden.

She paused irresolutely. The late winter moon was rising and cast a faint gray light over the blackness. Shadows stood out in black relief and Lucile was conscious that her own figure must be plainly visible against the snow-covered lawn.

"But there's no use in my standing here and shivering," she thought. "Perhaps the men have done their burglarizing and gone, or have been caught. I can't tell what may have happened or how long I was lying in the oat-bin. Anyhow, I've got to pass those bushes and if the men are in there and are going to kill me, they will do it in five minutes as quickly as now, and I won't gain anything but a bad cold by waiting."

She gathered the folds of her cape more closely about her and moved slowly out from the protecting shadow of the stable wall. Then, screwing her courage to the highest point she walked rapidly, with wildly beating heart, up the driveway and past the dreaded clump of shrubbery.

At the turn of the drive she stopped short, with an involuntary exclamation of astonishment. The house was still ablaze with lights, and in the upper rooms she could see hastily moving figures silhouetted fleetingly against the window shades.

"Have they heard the burglars and been alarmed, or was I in the stable only half an hour or so and the party is just ending?" she asked herself in wonder.

Then she remembered the dark bushes behind her and moved on again quickly toward the house.

In the meantime, the greatest excitement prevailed within doors. At supper time Mrs. Wentworth had sent Katy up to Lucile's room with a tray. Not finding her there, Katy had crossed to the schoolroom. This room also was empty, to the maid's surprise. Then she concluded that Lucile had gone down-stairs to join the party, and so went back to the kitchen. It was not until the guests had gone and Mrs. Wentworth questioned Katy as to how Lucile was feeling that the maid reported the girl's absence.

"I didn't say nothin' to you about it, ma'am," she said, her face paling with growing apprehension, "for I s'posed she was feelin' better an' had

gone down-stairs to the party. Wasn't she down there, ma'am?"

Mrs. Wentworth shook her head.

"No," she replied quietly, perceiving the maid's alarm and endeavoring to conceal her own fears lest she arouse a panic, "no, she did not come down-stairs, but she is no doubt somewhere on the upper floor."

"I looked in the schoolroom, ma'am, but she wasn't in there," said Katy, the tears coming to her eyes.

"Well, she may have gone into the guest room, where the ladies were putting on their wraps. Come, let us go up-stairs. I daresay we shall find her back again in her own room."

Just then Mr. Wentworth joined them.

"What is it, Claire?" he asked anxiously, glancing sharply from the weeping maid to his wife's white face. "Is Lucile ill?"

"No, not ill," replied his wife in a low voice, "but Katy tells me that when she went to her room at supper time, Lucile was not there. Katy thought she had come down-stairs."

Mr. Wentworth felt a sudden sensation of alarm, but he put his fears aside.

"She had probably left her room only for a moment, possibly to watch the party from the

stair landing. We'll no doubt find her tucked in bed and sound asleep," he said with forced cheerfulness, and led the way up-stairs.

But Lucile's room was empty, the gas burning low as she had left it. The three stopped in the open doorway and looked at one another in silence. Then Katy turned away and began to cry, holding her apron before her face and muttering incoherently that the darlin' child had been carried off and murdered, and it was all her fault! Mr. Wentworth frowned and was about to reprove her angrily, when Mrs. Wentworth laid a detaining hand on his arm and said gently :

"Hush, Katy. Nothing so dreadful has happened to Lucile. And nothing is your fault. Calm yourself now and help us to find her. She has gone to some part of the house, probably to watch the party as Mr. Wentworth says, and has fallen asleep. Let us each look through the rooms up here quietly, without saying anything to the others."

So the three set about their search, quietly, almost unconcernedly at first, convinced that the missing girl would be discovered in some cozy corner asleep. But as room after room was examined in vain, they became alarmed again.

Down-stairs the waiters were piling up plates

in the pantry and tidying the dining-room. Presently Mr. Wentworth descended and asked them if Lucile had been seen by any of them. They all shook their heads in surprise. The cook paused in the midst of her dish-washing.

"No, sir. She wasn't down here, sir, though I was 'spectin' a visit from her as soon's the ice-cream 'nd cake was ready."

With a sinking heart Mr. Wentworth wandered through the vacant parlors. The gas was still burning brilliantly, for no one had thought of turning it down. There was no use in looking for Lucile in any of these rooms as they had been too well filled with people all evening for her to have escaped observation. He mounted the stairs again and was met at the top by his wife and Katy, Mrs. Wentworth now looking as frightened as the maid herself.

"Katy has found Lucile's white dress on the bed," she said hurriedly, "but her school dress, golf cape and hat are gone out of her closet. She must have left the house."

Mr. Wentworth grew white with a suppressed anguish of suspicion. Could his daughter have run away from home? But there was no time to indulge in thought now. He must act.

"What shall we do?" Mrs. Wentworth asked,

her eyes seeking his with an expression which told him that she shared his fear.

Just then they were attracted by a sound below them. They turned to see the side door open slowly and Lucile entered. In a moment Mr. and Mrs. Wentworth were at her side.

"Lucile!" cried her father in genuine alarm, "Where have you been and what has happened?"

Lucile's clothes were torn and soiled; her bare hands were bleeding where she had scraped the knuckles in unbolting the harness room window, and one eye was swollen and discolored by the ugly bruise which disfigured one side of her face.

The girl looked at her father blindly, dazzled by the bright light after her long hour in the darkness.

"Did they get anything?" she panted.

"Get anything! Did who get anything, Lucile?" asked her father, wonderingly.

"Then they haven't come yet, and I am in time. Oh, I am so glad," and she sank weakly down in a chair.

"But I don't understand!" exclaimed her father. "Where have you been and how did you get that bad bruise?"

Lucile looked up quickly and then dropped her eyes. She suddenly remembered her original

reason for leaving the house. She had forgotten her grievance in the fright and excitement of the past hour. But her father was waiting for an explanation.

"Well, I was feeling better," she began in a tone of defiant carelessness, "and I thought I'd take a breath of fresh air. I put on my things and went as far as the gate and back. I thought I'd come in by the kitchen and get something to eat. But as I was going around by the store-room I heard voices. Two men were talking. They were planning to rob the house. I wanted to warn you but they heard me and caught me. One of them hit me on the head and stunned me. When I came to I found I was in the oat-bin. I didn't know how long I had been there and whether the men were still there. But I climbed out of the bin. They'd locked the loft door so I had to drop down through the hay mow. I'm afraid they've stolen the horses. I climbed out through the harness room window and—well, that's all."

"That's all!" cried Mrs. Wentworth almost sobbing, "why, you poor, dear, brave child!"

Lucile drew herself up stiffly and stared coldly in the direction of her stepmother.

"I naturally did not want my father's house

robbed if I could prevent it," she said quietly and turned away. "I'll go to bed now, father. I'm tired."

Mr. Wentworth was speechless. His warm admiration for his daughter's courage and presence of mind were suddenly overpowered by a fierce gust of anger at Lucile's rude treatment of his wife. But before he could find words, Mrs. Wentworth again interceded.

"Let her alone now, Geoffrey," she whispered. "She is too wrought up to bear anything, even praise. Katy will go up and help her to bed and bandage her eye. It looks like a very bad bruise, poor child," she added sorrowfully.

Lucile locked herself in her room for fear Mrs. Wentworth might follow to offer her sympathies and services.

"I'm glad I didn't say it was the jewels they wanted to steal," she thought defiantly. "It would have served her right to have lost them, bought with money that should have gone to buy poor, suffering people food."

The next morning, in spite of the blackened eye and a general feeling of soreness, Lucile persisted in carrying out her plan of spending the day and night with Edith Wharton, who was to have a New Year's party. On the following day

she returned to school. Until the hour of departure she busied herself in her own room with her packing, and so saw but little of her step-mother.

Mrs. Wentworth did not seek out Lucile on that last day. The time now for getting acquainted was so short that she decided it would be wiser to let things take their own course and to trust to time and future opportunity to soften her step-daughter's feelings toward her. Mrs. Wentworth herself was busy packing too, for she and her husband were to start the next day on their postponed wedding journey. This trip had been put off purposely on Lucile's account, that she might not be left to finish her holidays at home alone. But if Lucile were aware of this act of consideration she made no sign.

CHAPTER XII

LITTLE THINGS

"OH, dear, why is mending so stupid," yawned Hetty Clarke. "I wish we could wear our things until they fell off us in rags."

"Or else that they grew on us like on nice little woolly dogs," added Mary, biting off a thread.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you, Mary," interposed Miss Jones, referring to the bitten thread.

The girls had been back at school for nearly a month. Each and every one had recounted her pleasures and adventures until they were tired of the reminiscence. Lucile's experience with the thieves was by far the most exciting of the stories, and she had figured as a heroine in the eyes of her admiring comrades. But even so thrilling an adventure loses its charm with repeated telling and the girls had finally settled down to the monotonous routine of school life.

It was the one unpopular hour of Saturday, the mending hour, and Mary and Hetty had brought their sewing into Lucile's room. Miss Jones was there, showing Ellen a new embroidery stitch.

"If only Miss Hobart would let us mend on Friday night," grumbled Lucile. "It makes me so cross to have my Saturday broken in on this way. Saturday's our own day, and I feel imposed upon to have a part of it taken from us."

Miss Jones could not help smiling, the speech was so characteristic.

"Would it make mending hour any more pleasant if some one read aloud?" she suggested.

"Oh, wouldn't it! I should think so!" chorused the girls.

"But the trouble with that is that we all dislike reading aloud," said Mary.

"I don't dislike it," replied Miss Jones quietly. "That is, if you'd like to have me."

"It would be perfectly lovely! You're a dear!" cried Hetty, and the others echoed her words. Then Lucile remembered her manners.

"But won't it take too much of your time?" she exclaimed. She knew how precious to her Miss Jones's few spare hours were. "Won't you be giving up too much for us?"

"Not if you are willing to make the hour an early one. Say from nine to ten each Saturday. You are all through with your tidying up by nine, aren't you?"

"We can easily get through by then," said Ellen, "and it will be much nicer to get the mending all done early and off our minds. Don't you think so, girls?"

"Ellen talks as if she had perfect heaps to do every week. I don't believe she ever pulls a button off, or wears a hole in her stocking," sighed Hetty enviously, whose buttons were always hanging by a thread and whose tapes just wouldn't stay sewed.

"Oh, yes, I do, lots," laughed Ellen. "Where shall we sit to read, Miss Jones?" she asked, coming back to the subject in hand.

"Let's have just us four girls and make it a secret society!" suggested Mary.

"And may be Miss Hobart will let us have something for refreshments afterward," added Hetty greedily.

But Miss Jones shook her head at this proposition.

"If you are going to form it into a private affair," she said, "I shall have to withdraw my offer. You know Miss Hobart dislikes anything

like clubs or societies. Besides, it would be selfish, for I am sure that the other girls find their mending quite as tedious and uninteresting."

"Yes, I suppose they do," admitted Mary grudgingly, "but somehow we four always seem to get together."

Miss Jones smiled again at this unconsciously admitted tendency to clique.

"Must we have all the girls?" asked Lucile, with a meaning emphasis on the all.

"I think it would be only fair."

"Even Mabel Goring and her set?"

An expression of pain crossed Miss Jones' face. She did not reply for a minute. Then :

"And why not?" she asked quietly.

The girls exchanged glances.

"Because she's—she's so disagreeable and says such mean things," answered Lucile with a tone of contempt in her voice. "She just detests me, though I'm sure I don't know why."

"Have you tried to make friends with her?"

"Yes, I have, honestly, Miss Jones. I didn't like her from the first, but I tried my best to be nice to her and her friends. Didn't I, girls?" appealing to the others.

"Yes, indeed. You were as patient as a lamb," declared Hetty loyally.

"I wouldn't have stood some of the things that she's said and done to you," added Mary.

"Mabel has been provoking, Miss Jones," echoed Ellen. "She fancies that Lucile is trying to make her unpopular with the other girls."

"As if I'd do such a thing!" exclaimed Lucile indignantly. "But I don't wonder that the girls dislike her, most of them, because she is so horrid. I'm sure she listens at doors and things."

"Oh, I'm sure of that," said Mary, noting Miss Jones' look of disbelief. "I caught her standing outside Miss Hobart's door one day when Miss Hobart was lecturing Norah. It was the time that book was missing, you know. I'm positive Mabel was listening, though when she saw me she pretended that she was just about to knock. And do you know," she added, "it turned out that Mabel had that book up in her own room all the time."

"I never heard that!" exclaimed Lucile. "Why, Miss Hobart asked the girls if any of them had taken the book and they all said no."

"I know. Mabel had some excuse about forgetting that she'd taken it. Miss Hobart caught her reading it one day."

"And she had it all the time and fibbed about

it?" cried Lucile, to whom an untruth was one of the very greatest of sins.

Miss Jones listened to this conversation in pained silence. She knew that there was reason for Mabel Goring's unpopularity among the rest of the school; more indeed than the girls themselves guessed.

"Well," declared Lucile, "if Mabel is asked to join, we don't want the mending club to meet in our room, do we, Ellen?"

"The schoolroom would be the best place to sit," interposed Miss Jones quickly, who thought the discussion had gone far enough. "It is so much larger and more airy for all of you."

"Well, what shall we read?" asked Mary. "At least we four ought to have the right to choose the book, since we are getting up the club."

"If you reason that way, Miss Jones should choose," suggested Ellen mischievously. "She was the one to propose it."

Lucile looked up quickly.

"We won't have to have anything instructive, will we?" she asked with a suggestion of wrath in her tone. "Surely Miss Hobart will let us read what we want on our holiday!"

Miss Jones laughed outright, remembering the

summer before and Lucile's suspicions regarding the reading class.

"No," she said rising. "It needn't be anything instructive unless you wish. I'm sure Miss Hobart won't mind if it's as uninteresting as a story can be, provided that it's clean and wholesome."

"Then let's read some dear love story," proposed Mary promptly.

"Oh, no, love stories bore me to death," exclaimed Lucile, turning up her nose scornfully.

"How about Miss Alcott's?" suggested Hetty.

"We've all read all of Miss Alcott's, I expect," objected Ellen.

"Yes, thousands of times," added Lucile. "I know them all by heart."

Miss Jones had been gathering up her work.

"Girls," she said. "I'm going over to the Congressional Library this morning to look up some references. Miss Hobart said that any of the girls could go with me who wished."

At that moment mademoiselle's voice was heard in the hall, bidding the girls get ready for a walk, and mending-baskets were put away hastily.

"But we four are to choose the book, so mind none of you say anything to the rest about the

mending club until we've decided on something," cautioned Lucile.

"I haven't had an opportunity to tell you how pleased I was with the etching you sent me at Christmas," said Miss Jones, Lucile taking her place at her side as they set out on their way to the Library. "And the note that came with it was most welcome indeed."

"I intended to write oftener," answered Lucile apologetically, "but somehow, the days just went by. I'm lazy about letters, you know."

She did not like to acknowledge that the real reason for her not writing was because she had failed to experience the long list of woes at the hands of her stepmother, that she had prophesied to her teacher. During their brief acquaintance the new mother had not given Lucile the smallest excuse for criticism. She had been genial, gracious, and generously unmindful of any lack of responsiveness on the girl's part. At parting Mrs. Wentworth had said, quite as a matter of course :

"I'll write once a week, Lucile, and I hope you will, too."

She had kept her word and the letters came regularly. During their wedding journey her

epistles had been full of the new scenes they passed through, and of little incidents of travel that Lucile read with unwilling interest. But she did not answer them.

Miss Jones shrewdly guessed the true outcome of affairs and asked no questions. But as the days passed and Lucile read to her occasionally, such extracts from Mrs. Wentworth's letters as concerned Lucile's friends and people with whom Miss Jones was acquainted, the teacher's heart felt lighter than at any time, regarding her favorite pupil's future.

Miss Hobart had granted a ready permission to the formation of the mending club, rejoicing in any arrangement that would make the detested hour bearable. The girls could not resist the temptation to form a regular club. They even went to the length of badges, made of bits of satin ribbon, with a mending-basket sketched at the top in India ink—Ellen's work—and the letters G.M.C., standing for general mending club. Nearly all of the girls joined the club, but some few refused, preferring the seclusion of their own room. Among these was Mabel Goring, whose absence however was a cause of secret rejoicing among Lucile's friends.

One Saturday morning, just as the reading

was finished and the girls were folding their work and discussing plans for the day, Miss Hobart came into the room. Her grave face prepared them for some announcement and they all stopped talking.

"Girls," said Miss Hobart, "I am sorry to say that something has happened; something that never happened in this school before, and which makes me feel very badly."

She paused a moment while the girls exchanged glances of wonder and surprise.

"Mabel Goring," proceeded Miss Hobart, "has lost quite a large sum of money. When she came down-stairs this morning she laid her pocket-book on the hall table while she went out for her morning walk. How many of you took your 'turn' this morning?"

Nearly all the hands were held up, for it was a school regulation to take a brisk walk around the square before breakfast. At the mention of the pocketbook Lucile flushed suddenly, and opened her mouth as if to speak. But Miss Hobart continued:

"Mabel had a ten-dollar bill and some change in the purse. She came to me after breakfast to pay for some books she had ordered. When she opened the purse, which she had left during that

time on the hall table, the small money was still there but the bill was gone."

Miss Hobart ceased speaking and waited a moment. The girls were all silent. They were sorry that Mabel had lost her money, and were puzzled over the mystery of its disappearance. But they had no suggestion to offer.

"Perhaps the bill fell out on her way downstairs," at last hazarded Mary Harrison.

"That might have happened, though I should think it would have been seen and picked up by some one," replied Miss Hobart. Then she asked slowly: "Have any of the rest of you missed anything—lost anything?"

The girls all shook their heads. Lucile stood somewhat apart, fingering her handkerchief and biting her lip. As soon as Miss Hobart stopped speaking she looked up and said boldly, though her lips were trembling.

"Miss Hobart, I saw Mabel's pocket-book on the table this morning, and I—I took it up and opened it. I was playing a joke on Mabel. It was a piece of paper that I put in the purse, but I didn't see any money."

She spoke proudly for she realized the light in which her action might be regarded, yet she held herself above suspicion. Miss Hobart regarded

her steadily for a moment. Lucile met her eyes frankly. Then, dismissing the others with a word or two, she asked Lucile to go with her to the study. Miss Jones gave the girl an appealing glance as she caught her eye.

"It would be ridiculous to accuse Lucile of such a thing," she thought. "It would hurt her feelings terribly and make her angry as well. I do hope she will keep her temper."

CHAPTER XIII

LOST MONEY

LUCILE followed Miss Hobart quietly down to the study. Mabel Goring sat there, red-eyed and rolling her damp handkerchief into a grimy little ball. She did not meet Lucile's eyes but looked down at her feet as she rose upon the entrance of the principal. Miss Hobart stood between the two girls and looked searchingly from one to the other.

"Now, Mabel," she said at length. "Lucile has acknowledged to taking up the purse. Tell her what you told me."

"Oh, Miss Hobart," gasped Mabel, "I—I'd rather not. Lucile doesn't like me and she might think I was trying to blame her."

Miss Hobart frowned.

"That is certainly what you made me think," she replied drily. "Tell your story, Mabel, and give Lucile the chance to clear herself."

Lucile stood where she had paused upon first entering the room. Her figure was drawn to its full height—and Lucile was tall for her age—her

head thrown back and her whole attitude suggestive of injured innocence. Mabel turned away from her and began hurriedly :

“I—I don’t know anything for sure but—but I thought I saw Lucile open the purse and take something out. I was just coming in the door as she went out and she pretended not to see me but ran down the steps and—and I didn’t look at the purse then, but after breakfast, when I came to pay you for the books, you know I found the ten-dollar bill gone.” She ended breathlessly, still keeping her eyes fixed on the handkerchief in her hand.

Lucile had been growing more and more angry and at this point she could no longer restrain herself but burst out :

“That’s not so, Miss Hobart. She must have looked into the pocket-book before she came to you, because she had seen the piece of paper that I had put in. I know that to be so, because she told one of the girls at breakfast that I had played a mean trick on her and she meant to pay me back. I suppose this is the paying back; telling falsehoods about me, and accusing me of stealing. Most likely she took the money herself and hid it so that she could say I took it.”

“I did nothing of the sort,” retorted Mabel

hotly, stung by Lucile's words. "And if you put anything in my purse, it isn't the first time you've done mean things to me!"

"Girls, girls," interposed Miss Hobart sternly, as Lucile was about to answer, "I can't have any quarreling going on. Lucile, it is so, isn't it, that you opened Mabel's pocketbook when it lay on the hall table?"

"Yes," replied Lucile reluctantly.

And you say that there was no money in it then?"

"I said I didn't see any. There might have been for all I know. I didn't stop to examine it, I'm sure. I slipped in a piece of paper and left it. That's all I know," and she closed her lips with the determination not to speak again, though her eyes flashed and her foot tapped the floor nervously. She folded her arms to keep from clenching her hands.

What was it that you put into the pocket-book?"

Lucile did not reply.

"Lucile, answer me when I speak to you. What was it that you put into Mabel's pocket-book?"

"I don't see what that has to do with the lost money," said Lucile obstinately.

"Tell me, Lucile."

"Oh, well, then, it was a silly little bit of writing to tease her."

"It was a very rude piece of writing," interrupted Mabel angrily.

Miss Hobart turned to her sharply:

"Then you have seen it?" she asked.

Mabel saw that she had betrayed herself. She flushed and looked away awkwardly.

"Why, yes, I did just peep into the purse to see what Lucile was doing, meddling with my things. I found the paper and just then the breakfast bell rang. I didn't miss the money then," she added, "but I didn't have time to look any further."

"Do you mean that if you had had time, you would have counted your money, to see if any were missing, because you had seen Lucile with the pocket-book?"

"I don't know—I might have," reluctantly.

"Have you any reason for supposing Lucile to be dishonest?"

Mabel's eyes filled with tears. She was beginning to realize the seriousness of her accusation.

"No," she said in a low voice. "Only, Lucile might have taken it just to plague me. She's always teasing me. She doesn't like me and so

she's trying to get the other girls to turn against me," and Mabel began to sob.

"Miss Hobart," exclaimed Lucile, "as if I'd do such a thing! Why should I care whether the other girls like her or not," she added scornfully.

"What was on the piece of paper?" asked Miss Hobart sternly, ignoring Mabel's tears.

"Nothing," said Lucile hastily. "Nothing that is, but a piece of silly nonsense. We were playing 'conundrums' last night and one of the answers was so good that I wrote it down and——"

Here Mabel, still sobbing, took a crumpled piece of paper from her pocket and held it out for Miss Hobart's inspection. The principal took the paper, adjusted her glasses and read:

"Why is Mabel Goring like a lamp?"

"Answer: because she never goes out unless she's put out."

She could hardly restrain a smile as she folded it up and put it back. She eyed the girls closely, Mabel with her face buried in her handkerchief, and Lucile standing with head erect, her eyes flashing and her lip curled scornfully. Miss Hobart, always just, perceived the truth of the matter.

"Mabel, do you think that silly jest was worth such a serious revenge?" she asked quietly.

Lucile's face lighted up, and she took a step forward impetuously.

"Oh, Miss Hobart, you know that I didn't take it! Thank you!"

"But," stammered Mabel, looking very red and confused, "the money's gone, Miss Hobart, and I—I saw——"

"Hush, Mabel. Yes, the money's gone. There is still that fact to worry over," replied Miss Hobart with a sigh. "But I am fully convinced that Lucile did not have anything to do with it. And I am sure that in the bottom of your heart, Mabel, you don't think so, either."

Mabel began to sob again. Lucile asked permission to go.

"No," said Miss Hobart, firmly. "I want Mabel to acknowledge first that she sees her mistake, and apologize to you for her accusation. And I want you to tell her that you are sorry that you hurt her feelings by teasing her. Come," as both girls were silent, "Shake hands and be friends again."

Mabel stopped sobbing and held out her hand. She would willingly be friends with Lucile, the

school favorite. But Lucile drew herself up and put her hands behind her back.

"I won't, Miss Hobart," she said stubbornly. "It wouldn't be honest. I don't dislike Mabel but—but we just don't get on, somehow. If we did make up now, we'd just be fussing again tomorrow about something else. Besides, she's done a mean thing and I can't forgive her."

"Oh, Lucile, be charitable," faltered Miss Hobart helplessly. She realized the justice of Lucile's words. "I am very sorry," she said after a pause, broken only by the impatient tap-tapping of Lucile's foot and Mabel's renewed sobs. "At least, Mabel, you will acknowledge your mistake to Lucile, and she will accept your apology."

"I'm sor—sorry," sobbed Mabel. "I didn't mean to say you really took it."

"Thank you," said Lucile coldly, and turning away she left the room.

She had controlled herself admirably, but upstairs in Miss Jones' room, whither she flew for sympathy, she gave vent to her feelings.

"Oh, Miss Jones," she sobbed, flinging herself on her knees and burying her head in the teacher's lap. "That mean, spiteful girl actually accused me of stealing!—me, of stealing!"

Oh, Miss Jones, I am so ashamed and hurt and—and everything! Did you ever hear anything like it? Just because I wrote down that silly conundrum we made up yesterday about her laziness in not going out, and stuck it in her purse. Did you ever hear of anything so horrid—so cruel! Oh, Miss Jones, I'm so ashamed!" and she cried so bitterly that Miss Jones's heart ached.

"There, there, dear. It was very wrong in Mabel, for I am sure she did not think any such thing in her heart. She could not have realized what a serious thing she was doing."

"Anyhow, Miss Hobart didn't believe her," said Lucile, much comforted by that thought.

"Of course she didn't. And none of the girls will. I mean," she added, catching herself, "they won't believe that Mabel was serious in meaning to accuse you."

"But as Mabel says, the money is gone," said Lucile, after a pause, rising to smooth her tumbled braids before Miss Jones' mirror. "What do you suppose could have become of it? Miss Hobart seemed bothered."

"Yes, she herself has lost several small sums of money lately, quite unaccountably. And yesterday morning I missed a gold and pearl

brooch off my pincushion. Miss Hobart is greatly worried over the matter. But please don't say anything about it to the other girls," added Miss Jones hastily. "I oughtn't to have mentioned it to you at all, only I wanted you to understand why Miss Hobart has taken this last loss so much to heart."

"How dreadful!" exclaimed Lucile aghast. "Of course I won't say anything about it, but I do hope Miss Hobart will find out the truth soon. Does she think some one in the house took them? How fearful it would be if one of the girls should turn out to be a—what do you call it? Some kind of crazy person who takes things without knowing it."

"A kleptomaniac, you mean? Oh, I trust it is nothing of that sort!" exclaimed Miss Jones. "But you have missed your walk, Lucile. How would you like to go down town with me on an errand, if Miss Hobart will let you?"

Lucile rather dreaded seeing the girls at luncheon, after what had happened in the morning, but they all gathered about her with such eager words of sympathy and trust that she found herself rather inclined to pose as an injured heroine. Mabel had tried to escape coming down, on the plea of a headache, but Miss Hobart insisted, say-

ing that something to eat would cure her. So she sat sulkily in her place, refusing to join in the conversation about her.

But though Lucile's innocence was so clearly established, the fact remained that the money was gone, and another small theft was added to the list of mysterious losses that had worried Miss Hobart for the past few days. She was utterly at a loss how to account for the two or three small sums that had vanished at odd times from her desk drawer, for the disappearance of Miss Jones' brooch, and now for this new loss, the considerable sum of money out of Mabel's purse. That the things must have been taken by some one in the house she realized, for no outsider had had access to the room. Yet to suspect any of the girls was impossible, and she felt convinced of the honesty of her servants. But the mystery must be solved ; which way should she turn ? How should she act ?

Since the purse episode it had become impossible to keep the matter longer from the girls, and they discussed the mystery curiously. One or two other small losses occurred and excitement grew. The girls began to pack their more valuable belongings and to ask permission to lock their bureau drawers. These, by the rules of the school

were supposed to be kept ready for the inspection, at any time, of mademoiselle.

Miss Hobart was in great distress and considered seriously the idea of employing a detective. Miss Jones reported Lucile's suggestion regarding kleptomania and for several afternoons during the absence of the girls on their daily walk, Miss Hobart and Miss Jones searched each of their rooms in turn, carefully. It took several days to go over them all, but their labor was unrewarded, for no article was found out of its place.

"If there is a kleptomaniac among the girls," said Miss Hobart, "she hides the stolen articles outside the school."

"Miss Hobart, have you ever had reason to suspect any of the servants?" asked Miss Jones.

"No," replied Miss Hobart promptly. "One hesitates to accuse servants of such a thing without absolute evidence. The loss of a situation on such a charge would probably cost them their bread and butter.

"Of my cook," she went on, "I am absolutely certain. She has been with me ever since I started the school, and a more honest, trustworthy soul was never found among her class. The chambermaid, Norah, has been with me for three years and nothing of this sort has ever happened

before. Jenny, the waitress, is new this year, but she came with the very highest of recommendations. Besides, she is never upstairs."

"She has been lately," said Miss Jones, speaking a little reluctantly. "I didn't like to mention the matter, but Norah hasn't been very well for some time past and has been having Jennie do her work sometimes. She has rheumatism, she says, but is being treated for it and hopes to be well again soon. She did not want you to know, for fear of losing her place."

Miss Hobart frowned.

"Norah should have come directly to me," she said. "She should have known that I would not dismiss her just because she was unfortunate enough to be ill. However, I'll send Jennie out on an errand, and we will look through her room, though she has always seemed honest to me."

Their search was vain. But Miss Jones' suspicions were fairly roused. If Jennie had really taken the things, she reflected, she had had plenty of time and chance to dispose of them.

CHAPTER XIV

BURGLARS

BUT though the girls were puzzled and frightened by the numerous small thefts that occurred, they were just then so taken up with discussion of two other great points of interest that the matter which at another time, might have created so much disturbance was now passed over as of minor importance.

To begin with, Miss Hobart had granted a petition which had been signed by all the girls. This was, to have, instead of the ever-to-be dreaded compositions, a school paper, prepared by an editorial staff chosen from among the girls, with Miss Jones as editor-in-chief. The paper was to appear once a month, each girl being expected to contribute some article, the contribution appearing under her own name or anonymously, as she chose. The post of editor was looked upon as one of honor raising the girl who held it to the height of importance in the eyes of the rest. It was

therefore decided to change the staff each month, thus giving each a chance to serve.

Thus, in addition to the charm of sending in anonymous contributions, there was the excitement of a monthly election of new editors. One issue of the paper had already appeared, and nearly all had chosen to send in their things under a pen name. It was great fun, while each article was being read, to scan one another's faces and at the end guess which had been the writer.

The only drawback to that first paper had been that nearly all the contributions were stories. The rest were attempts at verse. As some of the stories were long the reading lapsed over into two evenings, and proved more of a task than the editor-in-chief had counted upon. A limitation to the number of words to be used was consequently put upon the length of all articles. The would-be novelists grumbled at the limitation, declaring they could never write a story with any point to it in so few words.

"It will teach you conciseness," replied Miss Jones cheerfully, when the complaint was made, "and to say what you wish in the fewest possible words."

Another project, quite as absorbingly inter-

resting as the paper, was the choosing of a design and colors for a school pin. Miss Hobart had always objected to this idea in former years, considering it affected and aping the men's college societies. But the girls begged so hard and were so earnest in their pleading that she had yielded.

Many a discussion was held as to the combination of colors to be used. Each girl had a favorite, of course, which she was determined should be the one selected. But, fortunately for the peace of mind of those not concerned, the number of colors in existence being limited, several girls found themselves in favor of some one color. Thus the discussion dwindled into factions, each advocating her own cause with ardor.

Frequent and sometimes stormy were the meetings held, both private and public, general, and in groups of three and four. It was at dinner one evening that the final argument took place.

"I don't see how you can want anything but purple and gold," exclaimed one of the girls. "Purple is very popular this year, and violets would be so nice for the school flower. They are so fashionable."

"Pooh!" ejaculated another disdainfully, "we don't want to be fashionable."

"Besides," added Lucile, "violets will be over in another month, and then where will you be?"

"There are lots of other purple flowers," declared an espouser of their cause.

"Yes. Lilacs for one thing. But I should think the purple would be prettier combined with silver. Purple and white lilacs would be sweet."

"Oh, if we can't have purple and gold, I don't want purple at all," exclaimed the first speaker.

"Green is lots prettier with gold," remarked another.

"Oh, dear no! Green and white are much more artistic!"

"I vote for red and gold," called some one.

"Red and gold are so flashy," again objected Lucile.

"That's because Lucile wants scarlet and white," said Mabel in a stage whisper to her neighbor. "She never does think anything's pretty but what she chooses herself."

Mabel Goring's dislike for Lucile, founded upon her envy of the more popular girl, was extreme. Mabel stood at the head of her own small party—a certain clique of girls whose general tone inclined toward vulgarity. This state of

things was very unfortunate for the school as well as distressing to Miss Hobart, herself a lady of the highest type.

Lucile, who had started out by merely laughing at Mabel's little affectations and teasing her about her laziness, had been so constantly irritated and annoyed by many sly tricks and underhand acts of revenge in return for purely fancied slights, that her scorn had turned into a hearty detestation, and as Mabel was as popular among her faction as Lucile was in hers, the rivalry ran high.

Lucile overheard Mabel's sneering remark, but paid no attention.

"Why don't you girls who are so anxious for purple combine with those who want green; they're awfully pretty together if you get the right shades," she suggested.

"Oh, but I think we ought to choose a color that will go with either silver or gold," said some one else, bringing the discussion back to the starting point. At last the din grew so great that Miss Hobart put her hands over her ears and cried appealingly:

"Girls, girls, do stop talking all at once. I am almost sorry that I said you could have school colors at all."

"Suppose we let Miss Hobart make the choice," proposed Ellen.

This idea seemed fair to all and they seconded Ellen's proposal eagerly. But Miss Hobart refused the honor, declaring laughingly that she would never dare take such a responsibility.

"Why, girls, how do you know but what I might choose black and white, or brown and green," she said. "But as your greatest difficulty seems to be the question of combinations, why don't you decide first whether you want your color combined with gold or silver?"

"But it depends so much on which the color chosen would combine with best, the silver or the gold."

Miss Hobart laughed.

"That is a drawback," she admitted. "Well, choose your color first, and agree about the combination afterward. Only do, for the sake of your ear-drums at least, settle one point at a time."

Miss Jones was appealed to for assistance and, suggesting that they adopt Miss Hobart's plan, proposed carrying it out by written vote, and so avoid further dispute. This idea was accepted at once, and Miss Jones having agreed to hold the votes, took a basket into the girls' parlor and seated

herself with it beside the table. The half hour for recreation was thus spent and the study bell rang before the last slip of paper was handed in. The girls were so excited over the outcome that Miss Hobart consented to let Miss Jones go to the schoolroom and announce the result as soon as she had counted the votes, provided the girls would promise to continue their work undisturbed afterward.

Scarlet was the color that received most votes ; but this was only the beginning of still greater discussions, for there was the question of whether silver or gold should be combined with the scarlet. These points settled, there remained a design for the pin to be agreed upon. And so, as has been said, the matter of the lost articles became of passing interest.

At length the complaint of things missing ceased. Whether the thief had become fearful of being found out by Miss Hobart's close watchfulness, or whether it was a case of kleptomania which attacked its victim only at intervals, Miss Hobart was at a loss to say. Though she felt annoyed to have the mystery still uncleared, she was nevertheless relieved. And then one night something happened that set the whole school in a turmoil.

One evening, just after dinner, most of the girls were gathered about the piano where Ellen Metcalfe was playing on her violin to Hetty's accompaniment, when Mary Harrison burst into the room, her face white and her eyes big with terror.

"Girls, girls," she gasped, "there are burglars in the house!"

"What! Where? Did you see them? What did they do?" cried a chorus of frightened voices, while some of the more timid ones shrieked and one trembling maiden quavered:

"Did they try to shoot you, Mary?"

"Miss Hobart ought to be told," exclaimed Lucile, as soon as the first flurry of excitement was over. "Go, tell her, Mary."

"Oh," cried Mary, "I daren't! I'm afraid!"

"Afraid to cross the hall! Nonsense. I'll go with you, then." And catching the terror-stricken girl by the arm, Lucile marched across the brightly-lighted hall to Miss Hobart's study door. Mary hardly waited for the summons to enter but tumbled headlong into the room, dragging Lucile after her. Miss Hobart looked up from her book in surprise.

"Oh, Miss Hobart," cried Mary. "I'm so frightened! There's somebody in the house! I heard them."

Miss Hobart looked startled and turned to Lucile for an explanation.

"I don't know anything about it," she said, "except that Mary came rushing into the parlor just now, and said there were burglars in the house, and I thought you ought to be told."

Mary was crying hysterically. She really had been badly frightened. She could not speak coherently at first and Miss Hobart repeated her questions patiently, trying to get at the facts. Just then there was a knock at the door. Mary screamed.

"May I come in?" asked Miss Jones' voice.

"Don't be silly, Mary," whispered Lucile, giving her an impatient shake. "Did you suppose that was the burglar knocking? Do tell Miss Hobart what you saw or heard."

"Is what the girls tell me about burglars, true?" asked Miss Jones anxiously.

"Mary has seen or heard something that has frightened her," replied the principal, "but just what it was I have not succeeded in making out. Mary," turning to her pupil, "are you calmer now? Well, then, let us have an account of what happened. Speak slowly and tell me everything."

"I'll try," replied Mary, still nervous. "I went

up to my room for my work-bag," she began, struggling bravely to keep back the tears. "I was so sure of where it was that I didn't light the lamp but just rummaged around in the dark. But it wasn't on the bureau where I'd left it, and it wasn't on the table either. I knocked a book down, fumbling about and it made a crash. Then I heard some one move in the room. I called Hetty, for I thought maybe she'd come up for something, too. I looked over toward the door and saw a dark figure slipping out of the room. I was so scared I couldn't move for a minute. The light was turned low in the hall so that I couldn't see very well, but I was sure it wasn't Hetty, because she'd have answered me when I spoke. Besides, this figure was all dark. And I don't think it was Norah, or I'd have seen her white apron.

"As soon as I could move at all I went out into the hall. I thought I'd go to some of the girls' rooms and see if they'd been playing a joke on me, by trying to scare me. But as I passed the schoolroom door I heard a sound in there—just as if some one was moving in a hurry, and had pushed against a table. That frightened me so that I ran down-stairs as fast as I could go. And I thought," she added, "I thought I heard a

window being raised, but I'm not so sure about that."

"But how could you have mistaken the figure of a man for one of the girls?" asked Miss Hobart, still unconvinced that Mary had not been the subject of a practical joke.

"It was almost dark and I wasn't thinking of seeing anything but one of the girls," answered Mary.

"And don't you see, Miss Hobart," added Lucile, "if it had been one of the girls trying to scare Mary, she'd have found out by this time how badly she had frightened her, and would have come to own up."

This was a clinching argument. Miss Hobart and Miss Jones held a consultation as to what had best be done.

"I must search the house," decided Miss Hobart, "though if it was a thief, he's no doubt made his escape by now. Miss Jones, you and mademoiselle keep the girls quiet in the parlor—see that they are all there and that nobody leaves while Bridget and I go over the house."

"Oh, Miss Hobart," exclaimed Lucile, "let me go with you! I promise not to scream or anything. Only two aren't very many against a man. He might attack you or something, and I could at least run down to get help."

"No, thank you, Lucile. I'll take my hand bell, and if we should need any assistance, I'll ring it. Miss Jones will be ready to run out to turn in the police alarm at the corner."

"Well, then, mayn't I go and get the watchman?"

"No, no. That would only create more excitement among the girls, and make the trouble public. I'd rather not have the matter talked about by outsiders if I can prevent it."

Lucile turned away disappointed. Miss Hobart pressed her hand warmly.

"Thank you for wanting to help me," she said kindly. "But it will be a much greater comfort to me if you will try to keep the girls cool and sensible down here. I am quite sure that I shall not find any one in the house, for if Mary really did hear a window being raised, the thief has long ago made his escape. It is not a long drop to the walk from the schoolroom window, you know."

So Mary and Lucile returned to the parlor with Miss Jones, where the girls were whispering together in frightened groups. Mademoiselle, in almost as great a state of terror herself, was trying to reassure them.

Meanwhile, Miss Hobart, accompanied by the

big, strong cook armed with a poker, searched carefully through each room, peering into the shadowy corners and closets, while Bridget got laboriously down on her knees to look under beds and tables. As Miss Hobart had supposed, they found nothing. A window was open in the schoolroom, and Mary's room which they searched next, was in a state of great confusion, though she herself might have done that in looking for her work-bag. That article was found lying upside down on the floor near the bureau. Convinced that Mary was right in thinking the thief, disturbed by her entrance, had slipped out in the dark and made his escape by the schoolroom window, Miss Hobart nevertheless continued her examination, in order to be able to assure the girls that all was well.

Mabel Goring's room was opposite Mary's, and upon starting to enter, Miss Hobart was surprised to find it locked. She rapped smartly. In a moment the door was opened and Mabel stood blinking at them from the darkness.

"Oh," she said, "did you knock long? I must have been asleep."

Miss Hobart remembered having given Mabel permission to lie down until study hour, as she complained of her eyes; she explained briefly

what had happened and bade her join the others in the parlor.

“Burglars!” cried Mabel, staring at her in terror. “Oh, Miss Hobart, I daren’t go downstairs by myself, if you really think there is one! A real burglar! Oh, Miss Hobart, please don’t make me go alone!”

“What do you mean by a real burglar?” Miss Hobart asked sharply. “Of course he’s real if it’s a burglar at all, which I begin to doubt,” she added with another sharp look at the girl.

But Mabel had grown so pale and seemed so genuinely distressed, that the principal sent Bridget to see her safely down.

CHAPTER XV

THE BIRTHDAY FEAST AND THE S. P. S. G.

WHILE Miss Hobart stood waiting for Bridget's return, the lamp she held suddenly flickered and went out. She went into Mabel's room, which was dark, to find and light hers, for the remainder of her search. As she was crossing the room, her foot struck against some object on the floor which tripped her. Miss Hobart grasped at the air in a vain endeavor to regain her balance, and then fell heavily. The object upon which she had stumbled slid from beneath her as she fell. Miss Hobart tried to rise but sank back with a sharp cry of pain. One ankle had been badly wrenched and to use it was such agony that she was only too glad to sink back on the floor again and wait for Bridget's help. Soon the cook's heavy step was heard on the stair and in a moment she appeared in the doorway, bearing a fresh lamp.

"Oh, Bridget," moaned Miss Hobart, "I've

sprained my ankle. Will you please help me across to my own room and then call Miss Jones."

Leaning heavily on Bridget's broad shoulder, Miss Hobart scrambled to her feet—to one foot rather. Then she glanced at the floor to see what it was that had tripped her. It was Mabel's valise, locked and strapped. By Miss Hobart's direction, Bridget lifted the satchel and put it over against the wall, out of the way of further mishaps, and then taking her mistress in her arms as easily as if she were a child, she carried her down the hall to her own room.

The sprain proved a severe one, and poor Miss Hobart was obliged to submit to being a prisoner on the lounge of her bedroom for several weeks. There she received and heard her classes and carried on her duties as best she could. Miss Jones tried to impress upon the girls' minds that they should be on their very best behavior so as to make everything easier for the invalid. For a time, they were models—positively angelic! Poor Mary Harrison looked upon the accident as entirely her own fault, because of her foolish fright in regard to the supposed burglar. Her remorse and self-reproach were so great as even to affect Lucile's daring spirit, and so for a time all went smoothly in the school. Too smoothly,

indeed, to last ; a break was bound to come, and who should bring it about but gay, scatterbrained little Hetty Clarke, Mary's room-mate.

"Girls," she cried, flying into the room one day, where Mary was entertaining Lucile and Ellen with a graphic description of some past escapade, "Girls, next week's my birthday, and Miss Hobart says I may have a box from home! Hurrah! Mamma's going to send just loads of things!"

"Oh, Hetty, how jolly! What larks!" exclaimed the girls. "Will Miss Hobart let us have a spread?"

"No, she says the things must be put on the dinner-table, but at any rate we'll have one square meal."

"Oh, Hetty, how greedy."

"Indeed I'm not. But I'm so tired of roast beef and rice pudding. And girls," she added, "the cake is to have a ring, a sixpence, and a thimble in it. Won't it be fun to see who gets what?"

The box arrived in good time and was unpacked in the back hall under the superintendence of mademoiselle, her shrewd little eyes on the alert for contraband articles. It was a very large box, but a letter from Mrs. Clarke had ex-

plained the reason. Several of Hetty's friends had asked leave, she wrote, to send their gifts, "fancy things they'd made themselves," in Mrs. Clarke's box. So the half dozen packages at the bottom, tied with ribbon and the inscription, "happy birthday" written on each, Hetty was allowed to carry to her own room for private inspection. Hetty piled up the packages in her arms and invited Mary, Ellen and Lucile to assist at their opening. Her manner was so mysterious that the girls suspected something and followed at once. Hetty laid the bundles carefully on the bed, closed and locked the door, then tiptoed back and said in a triumphant whisper :

"Girls, they're things for a spread!"

"Oh, Hetty, however did you think of it!" chimed the girls delightedly as they clustered about the bed and helped to untie the bulky packages.

"The girls at home thought it out when I wrote them that I'd have to put my birthday things on the table. Aren't they trumps?"

There were olives, pickles, chocolate cake, a charlotte russe put up in a tin box, packed inside of one labeled "Ladies' hose; fast black," and a huge box of home-made candies.

"How did your mother allow it? She must be awfully nice," exclaimed Lucile.

"Oh, she didn't know what the things were. The girls really did make everything themselves, except the olives and pickles, so you see they didn't tell her fibs. I wonder what this is," she added, unwrapping what, by the perfume, was apparently an immense sachet. Inside it were revealed, neatly folded in oiled paper, two dozen or so chicken sandwiches."

"Oh, girls! Doesn't it make your mouth water," cried Mary. "Hetty, do give us each one now, just one. I'm simply starved."

"Why of course, help yourselves, all of you," responded Hetty hospitably. "Wasn't it clever to wrap them in sachet, so Miss Hobart couldn't smell the chicken. And oh, wouldn't Made-moiselle be hopping if she could see what my birthday presents really are! Girls," she went on, "there are hardly enough of the things to go around among all of the girls so let's just us four have the feast. It'll be a great deal more fun and we won't be so apt to get caught."

"Mercy!" cried Lucile, jumping up suddenly. "There goes the bell for study. Do get 'em smuggled somewhere out of sight, Hetty."

It took a good deal of ingenuity to stow the

delicacies out of the reach of Mademoiselle's prying eyes, and the girls were late for study. Afterward, naturally, the others asked to see Hetty's birthday presents, and she had to do a good deal of evading before she could escape to dress for dinner.

The birthday feast was very jolly. Mrs. Clarke had sent *bons-bons*, the kind that have paper caps of droll shapes inside, and Miss Hobart had ordered ice-cream in honor of the occasion. In the absence of the principal, who could not yet leave her room, Hetty was seated at the head of the table to preside in her stead, and cut the first slice of the cake, after the candles had been wished upon and blown out. The handing about of the cake was a time of breathless interest, and each piece was felt with eager fingers. Great shouts arose over the discovery of the articles within. To Mabel's lot fell the ring, Lucile was the lucky finder of the sixpence, while Hetty herself had the thimble. They lingered so long over dessert that a bare ten minutes was left for recreation time. Hetty, Mary, Ellen and Lucile held a whispered discourse on the stairs with the result that, after study hour, they each retired quietly to their own rooms with apparently no other thought than getting to bed and asleep as soon as possible.

But barely five minutes after the bell had rung for lights out, two figures, clad in loose wrappers and with bare feet, tiptoed out of a room in dangerous proximity to that of Miss Hobart and stole noiselessly down the hall. At the opposite end of the corridor they pushed open a door left ajar, disappeared into the darkness within and closed the door softly behind them.

"Girls," whispered a voice cautiously in the darkness.

"Yes, all right," another sepulchral tone replied.

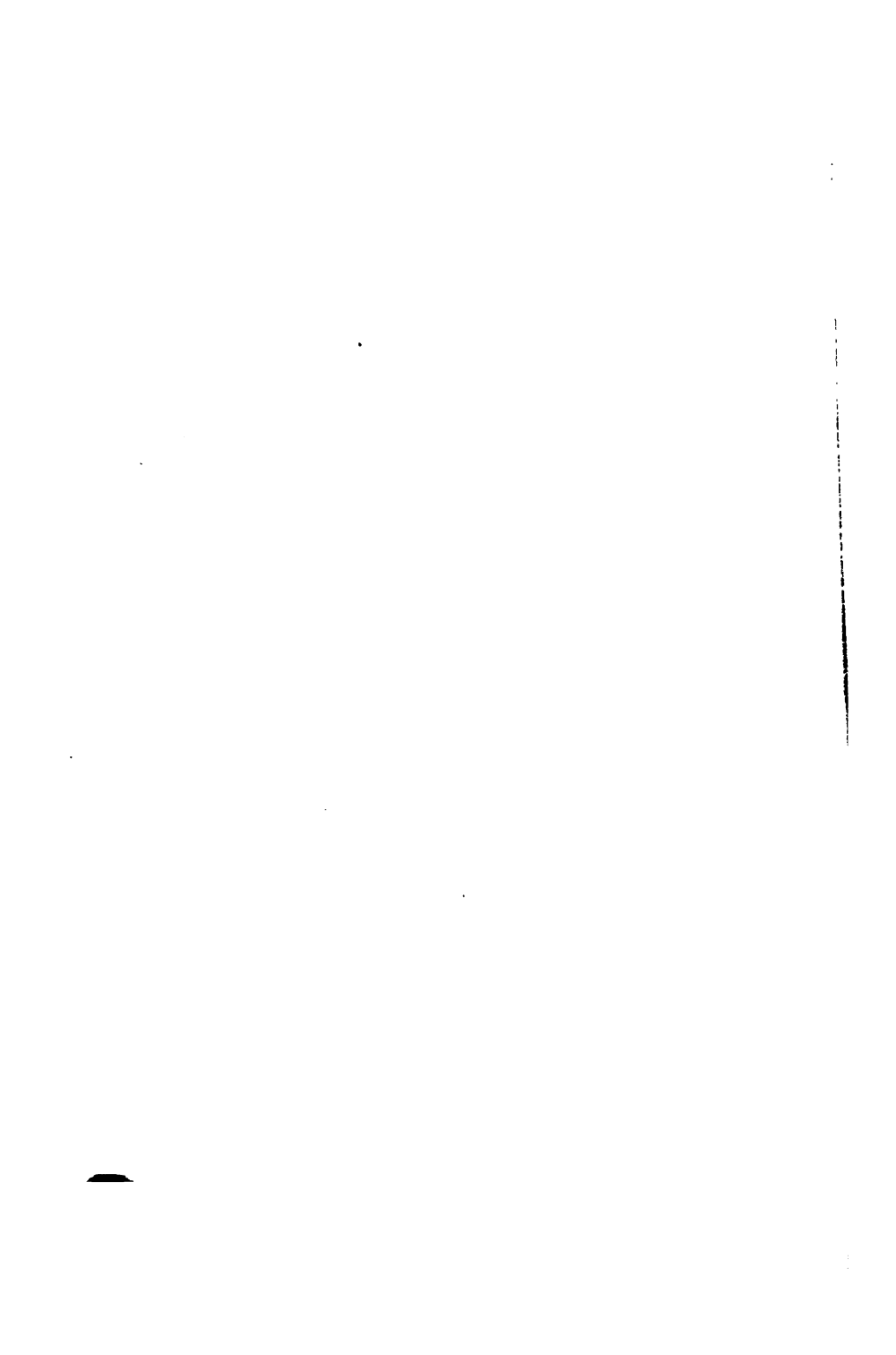
Then two white figures popped out of two white beds, a hushed scramble ensued, and then, a blanket being folded across the door to hide the betraying lamplight, the feast was spread out.

"Here's my contribution," said Lucile, producing a small tin bucket from the folds of her wrapper. "I slipped down-stairs and bribed Biddy to let me buy a pint of milk from the milkman, and we're going to make chocolate over Ellen's alcohol lamp."

The "spread" progressed merrily. Owing to the smallness of the stewpan the cocoa had to be made in two instalments, and then arose the question, forgotten until now, of how to drink it.



"WHAT A LARK THIS IS!"



The two tooth-mugs were called into use, a glass that Hetty had brought up from dinner with ice-water supplied a third receptacle and finally Hetty remembered a tiny silver traveling-cup attached to her chatelaine for the fourth.

"What a lark this is," Lucile sighed rapturously. "Hetty, your friends are simply dears. I don't know when I've tasted such lovely chocolate cake."

"Or such charlotte russe," echoed Ellen.

"Yes, isn't it fun," agreed Hetty with her mouth full. "And it was so easy to get the things smuggled in. I don't see why we shouldn't have spreads oftener."

"But you can't be receiving birthday boxes every week, Hetty."

"No, but there are lots of other ways," declared Hetty. "I've heard of girls getting underclothes sent in a bundle from home, with cakes and things wrapped inside."

"Or we could buy things when we're out walking and take them to one of the stores to be wrapped with dry-goods. Miss Hobart would never suspect," said Mary.

"Girls, girls," cried Lucile excitedly. "Let's do it! Let's have a spread society of just us four. We'll call it the Society for the Preven-

tion of Starving School Girls; the S.P.S.S.G.! Hurrah!"

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!" echoed the other three in enthusiastic whispers.

"The cocoa's done," said Lucile. "Come, let's fill our glasses—mugs, rather, and drink to the health of the S.P.S.S.G.!"

The toast was drunk with delight and a second batch of milk put on to boil, while the girls munched and made plans for the carrying out of their scheme. Just then the hall clock began to strike and they all stopped whispering to count the strokes; then they looked at one another in dismay. It was midnight!

"Why, I hadn't any idea it was so late! We must fly back to bed. Come quick, Ellen," cried Lucile in a panic.

Something in the mystic hour must have roused a superstitious terror in the girls' minds, for Ellen and Lucile, with no further thought of feasting, extinguished the light hurriedly and stole out into the hall, while Hetty and Mary popped soberly into bed, trusting to an opportunity before breakfast next morning in which to clear away the tell-tale remains of the lunch.

Hetty curled down among the blankets and settled promptly to sleep, but Mary noticed a faint

glow in the room and sat up in bed to see from where it came.

"Hetty," she whispered, "Lucile's forgotten her alcohol lamp and the thing's still burning. Do you know how to put it out?"

"You just blow, I suppose," answered Hetty sleepily.

But as Mary was climbing out of bed to extinguish the lamp, there was a sudden low report and a flash that made her cry out in alarm. The lamp had exploded. In an instant the flimsy window curtains, near which the lamp had carelessly been set, were ablaze, and Hetty's and Mary's terrified screams of "Help, fire, fire!" resounded through the silent house. The halls were immediately filled with frightened, panic-stricken girls, shrieking and crying. Miss Hobart in her terror, forgot the sprained ankle and sprang from her bed at the first alarm. At the door she fell helpless and dragging herself to a standing position, supported herself against the side of the door and implored some one to calm the girls and tell her what was on fire. In the meanwhile, Mary had regained her senses. With Lucile's help she had pulled down the curtains and was smothering the flames in the rugs. Lucile and Ellen had rushed to the

scene at once, a guilty consciousness of somehow being to blame lending wings to their feet.

Miss Jones, whose room was in a far corner of the third floor and who had not heard the noise at first, now appeared on the scene. She endeavored to soothe the excited girls and to restore order, thinking the mischief over. But more harm had been done than was at first supposed. The window sash had become heated by the intense flame of the lamp, and had charred away, unnoticed by the girls until the added heat of the blazing curtains had encouraged it to burst into flame. The highly varnished wood-work burned quickly, and a serious conflagration threatened. The night watchman outside, warned by the glare, sent in a hasty alarm of fire from the box at the corner and then rushed in to see what help he could offer. Miss Jones did her best to avert the threatened panic among the girls, assuring them that there was no immediate danger and sending each to her own room to dress in case an exodus from the house became necessary.

Lucile was of great assistance to her, her own coolness doing much to quiet the others. All the while a great heavy weight rested upon her heart like lead. She was to blame. Not only had all of the rules of the school been broken by

their having the secret merry-making but Miss Hobart had always been most strict in her orders that the girls must have nothing in their rooms in the way of a spirit lamp or anything threatening the danger of fire. This alcohol lamp was Miss Hobart's own, lent Ellen a few nights previous to heat water for tooth-ache. Lucile, in her accustomed self-willed thoughtlessness, had taken the lamp for her cocoa, never stopping to think that in so doing she was betraying Miss Hobart's trust. And now—the endangering of over fifty people's lives as a result of her wilfulness! Would Miss Hobart ever forgive her?

Miss Hobart! Lucile suddenly remembered that she was lying helpless in her own room. She would be unable to escape if the fire spread! The thought took away all her splendid self-possession. She dashed down the hall to Miss Hobart's room. The loud clang of a gong in the street below, accompanied by the clatter of galloping hoofs increased her terror.

Miss Hobart was lying, pale and exhausted, upon her couch. She had put on a long, dark wrapper and an afghan was thrown over her feet. Miss Jones had just left the room, after assuring her that the danger was over, and had gone down-stairs to tell the firemen that their as-

sistance was not needed. Miss Jones, the watchman and Bridget had succeeded in overcoming the blaze by means of wet blankets and the fire grenades in the hall. Lucile, busy helping some of the girls on the floor above to dress, did not know this. With a frightened sob, she caught Miss Hobart up in her strong young arms and bore the astonished principal out into the hall, beseeching some one to save her. She actually got her as far as the head of the stairs before her strength gave out and she would heed Miss Hobart's repeated protestations that the fire was out.

CHAPTER XVI

IN MISS HOBART'S ROOM

THE next morning Lucile went to Miss Hobart and made a clean breast of the whole matter, only reserving the fact that the idea of the feast and the furnishings for it, had been Hetty's. Indeed so general was her self-condemnation that Miss Hobart almost believed that she and she alone was to blame for it all.

"We even went so far as to plan a whole series of spreads," concluded the penitent. "We made up a society and called it the 'S.P.S.S.G.'"

"And what was that astonishing array of letters intended to mean?" asked Miss Hobart, smiling in spite of the seriousness of the occasion.

Lucile flushed guiltily. She had not intended to tell quite so much.

"It stands for 'The Society for the Prevention of Starving School Girls,'" she replied in a low shamed voice, and with hanging head.

Miss Hobart looked hurt.

"Don't you girls really get enough to eat here at school?" she asked after a moment.

"Oh, Miss Hobart," cried Lucile ashamed. "It isn't that. You know it isn't! But don't you know, we all like—well, things that aren't good for us, I suppose. And I don't know why, but they always taste better when they are smuggled in," she ended with reluctant frankness.

"'Forbidden fruits'," sighed Miss Hobart. "But though the feast, as you call it, was wrong enough in itself, still, the playing with fire was so much greater a sin. Just think, Lucile, you endangered the lives of——"

"Oh, don't you suppose I realize it!" interrupted Lucile with a sob. "Haven't I just been tossing about all night long in bed, thinking of it!" and she buried her head in the sofa cushions, giving way to the tears that had been held back so bravely until now.

Miss Hobart let her have her cry out undisturbed.

"It seems to me I'm always getting other people into trouble—or danger," said Lucile after a while, drying her eyes mournfully. "I don't mean to do it, of course. I just don't think. I want to do something that I think would be fun, and so I go ahead and do it. Then something dreadful happens and I'm

frightened and sorry and try to be good, until the next time comes. Then it happens all over again.

"I just don't seem to know how to be good," she went on in a choked voice. "I do something that seems all right. At least it doesn't seem as if anything very wrong could come of it, and then all at once, everything's dreadful!"

"Did you ever stop to realize how much wrong can come of 'I didn't think'?" asked Miss Hobart soberly. "They are very harmless sounding little words, but think of the trouble and grief and even worse, they can bring in their train. Now, when you took that alcohol lamp into Mary's room last night, I daresay you only thought of what a good time you could have with it, and how nice the cocoa would taste. I am sure it did not enter your mind that you were doing a dishonorable thing."

"Oh, Miss Hobart!" ejaculated Lucile in a voice of horror.

"But what else can I call it, my dear? I lent Ellen the lamp for heating water to relieve her aching tooth. You all know that I never allow alcohol lamps to be used except in case of illness. Yet you took that one for purposes of your own pleasure, breaking several of the rules of the

school, besides betraying the trust that I had shown you both in leaving the lamp in your care.

"Don't you really think it was very much like getting possession of something under false pretenses?" she continued, seeing the look of protest in Lucile's eyes.

"I suppose so," answered the girl humbly.

"Of course," went on Miss Hobart, "you could not foresee how very serious the consequences would be, but if you had stopped to think that it would not be honorable to make such use of something I had lent for a very different purpose, I feel quite sure you would not have taken the lamp. As it is, I am convinced that your thoughts never got beyond the point of how lucky it was that the lamp was there, to suit your convenience."

"That's just what I did think, Miss Hobart," acknowledged Lucile. "It's all I ever think; just to feel glad that things are arranged so that I can make use of them for a good time. And then, when it's too late, and something dreadful has happened, I see how wrong it was. But I always see it afterward, and that doesn't help me at all."

"That is because you don't think beforehand Lucile, it seems to be necessary for some calamity

to happen to show you your faults, and it's very hard that you should have to suffer so much. For I am sure you do suffer for all these mistakes."

"But Miss Hobart," protested Lucile, "how am I going to stop myself in time? I think of something to do that will be fun and—well, I just do it, that's all."

"But don't 'just do it.' Surely you have enough self-control to stop and think before acting!"

"I've never been taught to think," said Lucile in a low voice. "Most girls have their mothers but I—I haven't any," she ended, with a passing satisfaction in the thought that she was ignoring the claims of her stepmother.

Miss Hobart looked distressed.

"Lucile," she said, laying her hand gently on the girl's arm, "I am afraid that is one of the mistakes you are making."

Lucile drew back proudly and her eyes flashed.

"I won't call Mrs. Wentworth my mother, or even think of her as such!" she burst out angrily.

Miss Hobart shook her head. Of course she knew about Mr. Wentworth's second marriage, and Lucile's aversion to it, but she had not been thinking of that when she spoke.

"Gently, gently, my dear. Wait until you are sure of what I was going to say. I did not mean what you seem to think, at all. I was thinking of your real mother, whom you lost."

"Oh, I beg your pardon." The tears filled Lucile's eyes again. "But could I make a mistake about her?" she asked quickly.

"I mean that you have grown into the habit of excusing a great many faults in yourself on the ground that you have no mother—no one to warn you when you are about to do wrong, or to help you control that exceedingly quick temper of yours. But Lucile, dear, do you think all this is quite just to your mother's memory? I know how hard it is for a girl to be left motherless, especially at the age when she needs a mother most—if that can be said of any age," she added, half to herself. "But don't you think it would have been better if, instead of resenting any other authority as assuming her rights, you had accepted it instead as the best for you in her place? Don't you think she would have wished it? Lucile, did you ever stop to think how grieved your dear mother would have been if she had thought, when she was taken away from you, that you were going to be left to grow up without any care or control; that you would hold

yourself free from any responsibility for your actions and yet oppose any authority put over you, to take the place of hers?"

She ceased speaking and stroked the girl's hand gently. Lucile was crying softly. Miss Hobart hoped that she had not put things too plainly, or been too severe.

"Oh, Miss Hobart," whispered Lucile, through her tears, "do you think she sees and knows about it up in Heaven? Do you think that I have made her unhappy there?"

"No, no, dear. Don't you remember that our blessed Saviour has promised freedom from all unhappiness in Heaven? But I am sure your dear mother's spirit would be far more radiant, if she could see her little girl upon earth more docile and disposed to be led by those who are willing to accept the task that God's will took from her. After all, Lucile, it was God who took your dear mamma! Do you think that He meant then that no one else was to take care of you? Don't you see that you should accept help from any one who offers it to you, not rudely thrust their kindnesses away because you fear that they are in some way imposing upon you. You have a sweet, loving nature, Lucile, and it is hard to see such a garden of sweet virtues

overgrown by that great, unlovely weed, a bad temper."

Lucile's face was hidden now, but her shoulders shook with sobs and Miss Hobart stroked the two long braids of soft brown hair, in tender sympathy. There was a long silence, broken only by Lucile's hushed sobs, growing gradually fainter. At last she looked up.

"Thank you, Miss Hobart," she said brokenly. "No one ever talked to me in that way before. Miss Jones would have, I think, only I never let her. I used to—to treat her awfully, too, just like all the rest. Until one day something happened. I hurt her. I didn't mean to, you know, but I was very angry about something and was running up-stairs to my room. I passed her in the hall, and she caught my dress to stop me. I jerked it away, and it sprained her wrist. It hurt her so that she almost fainted. But she was so lovely about it, and we've been good friends ever since. But she never spoke to me the way you have."

"And I did it in fear and trembling," laughed Miss Hobart. "I confess that I expected every minute to see you jump up and fly out of the door."

"Oh, Miss Hobart, you don't think I could be so rude?"

"I don't know. I daresay, if you had been so angry as to want to leave me, you just wouldn't have thought," suggested her teacher teasingly.

Lucile blushed but smiled.

"Why, I didn't know you were at all like that, Miss Hobart," she said impulsively, eyeing her with delight.

"Like what?" in great surprise.

"Why—why jolly and joke-y; poking fun and all. I thought when I first came here that you were like my father. That you didn't care about the girls except to make them learn their lessons and behave properly."

Miss Hobart's face reddened and she sighed. Then after a moment:

"Honest confession is good for the soul," she said brightly. "I admit Lucile, that I have made a good many mistakes with my girls. I am afraid that I have not always approached them in the right way. I had the idea that I must be always quiet and reserved with them, to keep before their minds the fact that they were the pupils, I the teacher, or else they would not show me the amount of respect necessary for me to keep up school discipline."

"Oh, no, Miss Hobart. The girls would lots rather mind if they thought it hurt somebody's

feelings not to, instead of just breaking an old rule. It's rather fun to break rules, but it hurts to make people sorry, and it doesn't pay."

"Thank you, Lucile," exclaimed Miss Hobart with emotion. "You have taught me a lesson, in return for my long lecture."

"Oh, have I been disrespectful, or impertinent?" asked Lucile anxiously.

"No, indeed. You have been a great help, in putting to me plainly something that has been bothering me for a long time. But we have been talking too long. You must run away now, or you will be late for lessons."

"But Miss Hobart, can't you tell me something to do to make me think, when I want to do things. I mean something to make me stop long enough to think whether it would be right or not."

"Something to make you think. Let me see."

Miss Hobart was silent for a moment and then she looked up brightly.

"You are studying algebra, aren't you?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Lucile, wondering what that could have to do with the subject in hand.

"Well, then, why not make an algebraic equation of the matter. Suppose for example,

that you want to sit up in your room after 'lights out' bell, or——"

"Or to slip into Huyler's on our walk and buy some candy," interposed Lucile, unconsciously betraying herself in her interest.

"Thank you. That will make an excellent example," replied Miss Hobart, smiling. "Let A represent, 'I want some candy.' Let B represent, 'It is against the rule.' C; 'it would be deceitful to buy it on the sly.' X; will stand for 'right' or 'wrong.' So, $A + X = (B - C)$, for of course the objections would have to be eliminated before you bought the candy, wouldn't they?"

"Yes of course. After I'd once remembered them."

"Just so. Now let us transpose. That is done by changing the signs, isn't it?"

"Yes, it would be, $B + C = X - A$."

"Exactly," smiled Miss Hobart. "And the minus A would mean that your desire for the candy would be gone."

"I don't know that it would be gone," admitted Lucile honestly, "but after I'd gone through all that thinking, I'm sure I wouldn't get it."

"Of course it's far-fetched, and a little bit

foolish," responded the principal. "But perhaps that great, unsolved X will come up in your mind and ask to be worked out before you attempt another wild action. You can try it at any rate, my dear."

CHAPTER XVII

A RECEPTION AT THE WHITE HOUSE

A FEW days after this Lucile received a letter from Mrs. Wentworth, containing an inclosure which sent her flying up to Miss Jones's room in a whirl of excitement.

"Oh, Miss Jones," she cried, "what do you think?"

Miss Jones smiled and looked ready to be interested. Lucile drew the enclosed envelope, large, thick, and oblong, from her letter, and laid it across the open book which Miss Jones held on her lap. In one corner of the envelope was engraved in small black letters, "Executive Mansion."

Miss Jones arched her eyebrows in pleased surprise and opened the envelope. It contained an invitation to a reception at the White House enclosing a card of admission.

"That is for me," said Lucile impressively. "For me and you, Miss Jones."

"For me! Why for me, too?"

"You are to take me. That is, if Miss Hobart will let me go," she added gravely.

"Why shouldn't she let you go, Lucile? I am quite sure she approves of the President," said Miss Jones with a smile.

"Oh, no, I didn't mean that. I meant she may not allow me to have this treat after the other night, you know. I really don't deserve it."

Miss Jones considered a moment.

"I hardly think Miss Hobart will deprive you of this pleasure," she then said. "Of course you must take the invitation to her at once and ask her. But I am sure she will let you go, for it would be an education as well."

"Well, I wouldn't blame her for taking advantage of such a good chance to punish me about the fire. It was a dreadful thing," answered Lucile soberly.

Miss Jones marveled at the change in her pupil. A few months ago, the very idea of Miss Hobart's depriving her of this good time would have been enough to throw Lucile into a fury. Now she discussed the probability of such a thing—acknowledged the justice of it, indeed—calmly. But Miss Jones did not betray her thoughts by look or word.

"Tell me how you came by this most interesting and important document?" she asked.

Lucile flushed and glanced down at the letter in her hand.

"It is from—from Mrs. Wentworth," she explained awkwardly. "It seems that she knows people here in Washington who know, or have met, the President. These friends got the invitation for—for her and my father. But she writes that they cannot come on to attend it; that father is too busy, or something, and so she sends it to me. She says she thinks I'd enjoy it, and she's going to write to Miss Hobart to ask her to let you take me."

"How very kind!" exclaimed Miss Jones. "Miss Hobart will surely let you go, now."

"Yes, I suppose so," answered Lucile, her cheeks reddening. "But do you know," she said after a long pause, "I don't think I care so much about going, after all. I've been thinking it over and—well, I don't believe I want to go," she finished lamely, ashamed to give her real reason and unable to think of any other at the moment.

The truth was, that when the invitation came, she had hurried with it at once to Miss Jones, in a transport of delight, eager to share her excitement and pleasure with some one and never stop-

ping to think of the source of this kindness. It was very bitter to her to accept favors from her stepmother. Of late her conscience had been feeling somewhat sore on that subject. Mrs. Wentworth's letters had come so regularly. They were never long but were always interesting, containing news of Lucile's girl friends, for Mrs. Wentworth had a talent for sympathizing with young girls and their affairs and generally related some amusing anecdote or incident. They were bright letters, and entertaining. Even Lucile must acknowledge that. And there had never been a word or sign in them of resentment at Lucile's maintained silence. For she had never answered one.

As she stood now with Mrs. Wentworth's letter in her hand, and thought of this new pleasure designed for her, perhaps at a sacrifice of personal enjoyment on the part of her stepmother, Lucile felt ashamed and remorseful for her past ungraciousness. How could she accept this favor at the hands of one whom she had always treated so rudely?

She asked Miss Hobart's advice when the principal called her into the study after dinner to show her the letter that she had received from Mrs. Wentworth.

"I shall be very glad to let you go," Miss Hobart said cordially. "It will be an interesting experience for you ; something to look back upon and remember always."

"Yes, it would be awfully interesting," agreed Lucile. "But I—perhaps—I don't know whether I ought to go," she said slowly.

Miss Hobart looked surprised.

"Why not?" she asked. "Don't you think it would hurt Mrs. Wentworth's feelings to refuse this pleasure which she has evidently taken great pains to plan for you?"

Lucile looked up eagerly.

"Do you think she would be disappointed if I didn't go?" she asked quickly. "I hadn't thought about it in that way before."

"Miss Hobart felt puzzled. She thought Lucile's hesitancy arose from an unwillingness to accept a favor from some one she disliked.

"Then why were you thinking of refusing?"

"Why, you see—you know," confessed Lucile with downcast eyes and flushed cheeks, "I—I haven't been very nice or polite to her, and it seemed to me rather mean, after I've not answered her letters or anything, to let her do things for me. Don't you see?" She looked up plead-

ingly. "It might look as if I were willing to take all I could get without giving anything in return."

"Yes, I see," replied Miss Hobart in a relieved voice. She was glad that Lucile regarded the matter in that high-minded light. No doubt in time, her true, generous, justice-loving nature would overcome the girl's childish, unreasonable prejudice. "But why can't you do something in return?" she suggested.

Lucile looked at her blankly.

"I don't know what I could do," she said, then added quickly: "I could write and thank her for the invitation anyhow, couldn't I?"

"That would be the least you could do," replied Miss Hobart calmly. She spoke in so matter of fact a tone that Lucile saw that she did not understand the tremendous effort it would be.

She would almost rather give up going to the White House altogether, she told herself as she sat in her own room, nibbling the end of her penholder in a distracted perplexity as to how she should begin the letter. "My dear mamma," she would not say. "My dear stepmother," was too dreadful! There was but one other form, "My dear Mrs. Wentworth." It sounded very stiff and formal, but it would have to do, and the real grate-

fulness and appreciation displayed in the note itself almost made up to Mrs. Wentworth, when she received it, for the cold beginning.

When the evening of the reception came, the girls were all in a flutter of excitement, and gathered eagerly about Lucile as the carriage that was to convey her and Miss Jones to the White House, was announced. Each was desirous that she should notice and be able to describe minutely on return, some particular person or thing—the costume of the Japanese minister, what selections the Marine band played, of how the President shook hands and what his wife wore. Lucile promised to remember everything and drove off amid a chorus of good-byes, looking very important and interested indeed. Her blue eyes were shining and her cheeks flushed with excitement.

“Oh, Miss Jones,” she said softly, squeezing the teacher’s hand, “isn’t it just too lovely!”

The lumbering carriage rolled briskly down Sixteenth Street, skirted Lafayette Square and took its place in the long line filing slowly into the White House grounds. The sound of slamming carriage doors and shouting voices, mingled with the crunch of wheels. As they approached the brilliantly lighted mansion the strain

of a spirited march floated out toward them, and Lucile sat breathless, watching the beautifully gowned women, and men in evening dress, alighting from the carriages which drew up one at a time, under the porte-cochere and deposited their occupants at the foot of the broad steps.

"Just think, Miss Jones, we are actually going to shake hands with the President!" she ejaculated suddenly, squeezing Miss Jones's arm.

Then it came their turn to alight and Lucile found herself following the throng indoors. In a room on the right of the great entrance corridor, they divested themselves of their wraps, and then, entering the Red Room, took their places in the line of people that was moving slowly forward. Those about them were laughing and chatting, not at all impressed by the occasion. To most of them it was doubtless an old story and of no more interest or importance than any other evening party. But Lucile was hushed and awe-struck. Somewhere in front of her she could hear a distant voice pronouncing names. She knew that they were the names of those being presented. Soon hers would be spoken! People near her noticed the girl's rapt expression and smiled in kindly sympathy. Miss Jones watched her charge with unconcealed pleasure. Tall and

slender in the simple white frock, the rebellious brown braids smoother than Miss Jones had ever before seen them, the large blue eyes shining and the cheeks flushed with excitement, Lucile made a very pretty picture indeed. She smiled all unconsciously as she caught Miss Jones's glance, and clasped her hands to hide her growing excitement as they moved slowly forward. The places behind them were taken, and still others slipped in behind until the line reached quite into the corridor itself. In an other moment Lucile heard Miss Jones murmuring their names, first to an elderly officer in uniform who stood on the left of a narrow doorway, then to a handsome young lieutenant on the right, who each repeated them, slowly and distinctly. Lucile then felt her hand grasped for an instant by a very stout gentleman with a kind face, then by a slender lady with a charming one, and then successively by seven other ladies of varying ages, standing against a background of brilliant moving colors, topped with animated faces. At length, gently propelled by the moving mass behind, they found themselves in the great East room, among a large crowd of people, all more or less elaborately dressed, and all talking gayly.

"It is over!" whispered Lucile breathlessly. "I have shaken hands with the President!"

Miss Jones found two vacant places on one of the lounges and led Lucile to them. They sat down and reviewed the whole past scene.

"Who were all those other ladies, after we had shaken hands with the President's wife?" asked Lucile. "I didn't know there would be any one else."

"They were the wife of the Vice-President and the ladies of the Cabinet," replied Miss Jones. "And all those people behind them were their families or privileged guests. To be allowed to remain in that room is considered a great honor. It is called 'going behind the line,' meaning the receiving line."

Of the three large public receptions that the President gives during the winter, Mrs. Wentworth had obtained for Lucile an invitation to the most interesting, that given in compliment to the Diplomatic Corps at the Capital. On such an occasion the various Ambassadors, ministers and their suites, appear in all the glory of their Court costumes and add greatly to the brilliancy and interest of the scene.

Our two friends sat on the couch for some time to look about them, and to give Lucile time to

get over, as she expressed it, the creepy feeling at the back of her neck. After a while they rose and joined the throng, moving gradually toward the north end of the room. A turn of the room made, they stationed themselves near the doorway leading out into the corridor. Here they were out of the crowd and their position possessed the double advantage of being within hearing of the band, and in full view of the Chinese minister, who with his pretty, doll-like, wife, on his arm and surrounded by his suite, all in native costume, was holding court near by.

Presently Miss Jones pressed Lucile's arm and whispered :

"I see an old friend across the room. Do you mind my leaving you a moment while I go over to speak to her?"

"No, indeed," answered Lucile. "I am all right here, and it is such fun watching the people."

"Thanks. I won't stay but a moment, and I'll be right in sight all the time; if you should want me you can beckon."

Miss Jones made her way in and out among the people to where her friend was sitting on one of the couches on the opposite side of the room. Left alone, Lucile tucked herself back a little more against the wall and gave herself up to a

thorough enjoyment of the scene before her. It seemed to her, as she stood there, that every nation upon earth was passing before her—the Russian minister, all in white with his fur-trimmed cloak; the Turk in his baggy bloomers and a fez perched upon the corner of his ear; the oddly dressed little Coreans and the brilliantly gowned Chinese. The strains of the band were wafted pleasantly to her ears, while all about her rose and fell the murmur of voices in half a dozen languages. It was like a wonderful story to Lucile, and she fell into a dreamy trance of delight.

She was roused suddenly by the sound of voices close by. A familiar name caught her ear. Just in front of her, two men had stopped to greet each other. One was a United States senator; the other a friend from the senator's home. They had stepped aside for a few moments' quiet talk about home and home matters, and were standing quite close to Lucile so that she could not help hearing everything that passed between them.

"That was a bad scrape that Metcalfe's son got himself into," began the senator.

"Metcalfe," repeated Lucile to herself, waking from her reverie. "Why, that's Ellen's name. I wonder if it's any relation."

"Yes," assented the other, "It was bad. But the boy is doing well now, I hear."

"I'm glad of that," exclaimed the first speaker heartily. "How does his father bear up?"

"Very cheerfully. The boy's at work you know."

"Is that so? Where? Tell me the whole story. I only know the plain fact. That is, that the accident resulted fatally and Tom Metcalfe couldn't, or at any rate, wouldn't, give any account of himself or it, and so they expelled him, under a cloud of suspicion."

"Yes, that was it. Of course none of Metcalfe's friends believed that his son was wholly to blame, still, it was a disgrace nevertheless, having the boy leave college with that black shadow over him. His father and mother were fearfully broken up about it, naturally, and Tom was too. He didn't behave like a guilty person though. His father wanted him to go west, but Tom said he meant to stick it out at home and live down every last suspicion anybody might hold against him."

"Good for him. He was quite right, quite right," interposed the senator approvingly.

"Metcalfe's gotten Tom a place in one of the shipping offices," continued the man who was relating the story. "It is a hard grind every day from eight till six on a low salary. They say

Tom never complains but just sticks to it like a bull-dog."

"Tom always struck me as being the right sort at bottom, in spite of his wild ways," remarked the senator. "He's got grit and feelings; the right materials to make a man."

"It was really pitiful to see him when he came home disgraced, and to see how he felt it when his mother and sister cried so. Little Ellen was quite cut up, they say. Just pined all last summer. She and Tom were great chums, you know, and she was mighty proud of her brother. She's gone to boarding-school this winter. By Jove," he added, struck by a sudden thought, "she's at some school here in Washington. I'd look her up if I weren't going home to-morrow."

"Here in Washington!" ejaculated the senator. "Do you know the name of the school? I'll have my wife go and see her. I always did like Metcalfe and would like to do something for his daughter."

"Miss Hobart's the name. Somewhere on Sixteenth Street," replied the other, putting out his hand. "Well, good night, senator, glad to have met you. Interesting gathering, isn't it? Good night."

The two men shook hands again and separated, each soon lost in the crowd.

CHAPTER XVIII

ELLEN'S SECRET

LUCILE remained motionless, puzzled and startled by what she had just heard. She had listened idly at first, simply because the words were spoken in her hearing, her attention caught by the familiar name, but not connecting it in any way with her friend. Nor, indeed had she done so until they spoke of a daughter named Ellen, attending school in Washington. It was Ellen—her Ellen, of course, and this was the great trouble she had had to bear. Dear Ellen, how dreadful it must be to go about knowing that people believed one's brother guilty of some crime. And what crime? Those men must have meant murder—"an accident resulting fatally"; there could be no other interpretation. How horrible! No wonder Ellen guarded her secret so carefully! Of course it was not true. No one could know Ellen and believe such a thing of her brother. But it was hard to think that the suspicion of outsiders rested upon him. Poor Ellen, no wonder

she had cried and seemed so unhappy when she first came to school.

But at this point in her reflections, Miss Jones's voice broke in, saying reproachfully :

" You look tired, Lucile. I'm afraid I stayed away too long."

" No, indeed," she declared, rousing herself. " But I am ready to go, now."

She was very quiet at first, as they made their way to the cloak-room, full of her new thoughts, and Miss Jones wondered at her silence. But the bustle in the halls, and the confused scene without, men shouting for carriages, people moving to and fro, and vehicles driving in and out, brought her mind back to the scenes they were leaving, and in the excitement and pleasure of talking it over on the way home, the conversation that she had overheard and which had worried her so, was for the time almost forgotten.

A few days after this, Lucile, coming into the room which she and Ellen shared, surprised her room-mate crying. Ellen held a letter in her hand which she had evidently been reading when Lucile appeared.

" Why, Ellen, dear, what is it ?" she cried, rushing to her friend's side and throwing her arms about her neck.

"Oh, it's nothing," said Ellen hastily, brushing away the tell-tale tears. "I—I didn't mean to."

"I hope you haven't had bad news," exclaimed Lucile sympathetically.

"No, it's a letter from my brother. And it's good news, really, only—" and the tears began to flow again, "a letter from Tom always makes me cry. He's so good and brave and patient. Oh, Lucile I love my brother so!" and yielding to a sudden impulse, Ellen flung herself into her friend's arms and sobbed heartily.

Lucile sat in an awkward silence. Her heart ached for Ellen, but she did not know what to say to comfort her.

"I wonder if she'd mind much if she knew that I know all about it," she asked herself, yet hesitated to betray her knowledge of the secret that Ellen had guarded so carefully.

But at last she decided.

"Ellen" she said softly, "is the Tom Metcalfe, who was expelled from college, your brother?"

Ellen stopped crying and looked up in astonishment.

"Why, how did you find out? Have I been talking in my sleep again?" she asked, flushing.

"No—oh, no," answered Lucile hastily. "But

at the reception the other night, I overheard two gentlemen talking. I didn't mean to listen, but they were standing so close to me that I couldn't help hearing every word that they said. I didn't think it was anything about you, or your family at all, until one of them mentioned you and said that you were here at school, so then of course I couldn't help knowing that it was your brother they were talking about."

"What did they say?" asked Ellen, half eager to know what outsiders had to say of her family trouble, half resentful that it should be the subject for talk among strangers.

"Why, they were very nice about it all," said Lucile quickly. "They both praised him. One gentleman called the other senator and talked to him as if he'd been away from home a long time. The one called senator was very much interested—kindly—interested, you know, Ellen, and asked to be told all about it."

"Yes, I know. Senator West. They're awfully nice people."

"And," continued Lucile more slowly, "I didn't understand just what it was about but neither of the gentlemen seemed to think that your brother was—was guilty."

"And he isn't—oh, he isn't!" broke in Ellen

loyally. "I'm sure of that. I'm glad you know, Lucile," she added after a pause. "Papa asked me to say nothing at all about it, and of course I wouldn't want to, to everyone. But it's a comfort to think that you know and are sorry."

"Indeed I am sorry—terribly," responded Lucile warmly. "And now that I know so much, would you mind telling me all about it, Ellen dear?"

"I should love to," returned Ellen. "It would be such a relief to have you know it and I'm sure papa would not think I was breaking my promise in telling you, since you know so much already."

"It's just this way," she continued. "A letter came to papa one day from the President of the college to say that some of the boys had done some hazing—some fearful, cruel work, that had ended in an accident to the boy being hazed. It was believed that Tom was in the party. He wouldn't say anything, one way or the other, but the Faculty seemed very sure that he was one of them. The letter said that if the accident proved—if the boy died," Ellen's voice trembled over the words, "why, that Tom, and the rest of the party, of course, would be expelled."

"It was dreadful! Of course papa hurried

off to the college at once, and there was a lot of trouble. Tom held his tongue and papa got rather angry with him. He wouldn't believe at first that Tom had been mixed up in the business, but things were so strong against him, and Tom acted so queer, refusing to answer their questions and all, that papa began to go against him too. That nearly broke Tom's heart.

"Well, the boy did die—" Ellen stopped speaking, her voice breaking down in a little sob.

"Poor, dear Ellen; my poor chum," whispered Lucile comfortingly.

"He died," went on Ellen after a moment, "and Tom came home with papa. Mamma cried and papa did too, a little. As for Tom,—Oh, Lucile, you never saw anything so beautiful as Tom's face! They had a long talk in the library and Tom did own up to one thing. It seems that he hadn't had anything to do with the hazing, but knew who had done it. Tom had been naughty though, in another way. He'd been playing cards and had lost a lot of money. He owed the money to the ringleader of the hazing party. And when the accident happened this boy went to Tom and said that if he, (Tom) told who had done the hazing, that he would tell all about Tom's card-playing debts. Tom knew that that

would mean he'd be expelled, and promised at once to say nothing, never dreaming that the accident was so serious. So, his promise made, he was bound to keep it, and not to betray the other boy."

"But what a terrible thing to suffer for a promise!" cried Lucile, indignantly. "And how mean and cowardly of the other boy not to come forward and own up!"

"Yes," said Ellen, "it was cowardly. Such a suspicion was enough to ruin a man's life, papa said. But Tom is so brave and true that no one could really suspect him, no matter how black the facts against him.

"He's so plucky, too," she continued proudly. "You know he's working now, and every penny he earns he puts by to pay those debts. He won't let papa help him a bit. He says that when they are all paid, then he will be free of his promise and can tell the true facts of the case."

"Oh, how impatient you must be for that time to come! And how lovely and noble your brother is!" cried Lucile.

"Isn't he! Just the noblest brother in the wide world!" agreed Ellen enthusiastically. "This letter that just came, tells me that he has saved up almost enough, with his Christmas money

and all, to pay back the boy. And," she went on a little shyly, "though he wouldn't let papa help him, except of course with money presents at Christmas and his birthday, just as he'd always done, Tom has let me help as much as I could. That is the reason, Lucile dear, that I've always seemed stingy and out of pocket-money. I send every spare penny to Tom."

"You dear, generous girl!" exclaimed Lucile fervently. "I am so glad you told me all about it," she added after a pause.

"And I'm so glad you know," replied Ellen, putting her arms around her friend. "And about the last part as well—my pocket-money. I was so afraid you thought me a little miser."

"Nonsense, the idea!" ejaculated Lucile, hugging her closely.

This talk brought the two girls closer together. The full confidence now existing between them cemented their friendship and they began to be spoken of by the other girls as "the inseparables."

Lucile's visit to the White House was a favorite topic of conversation among the girls for many days. Lucile's clever description of what she had seen and heard, and her clear idea of all that had gone on, showed how observant she had been. It was evident that her visit to the Presidential

Mansion would be to her a long-remembered event.

But this interesting experience had not blotted from her mind that, long serious talk in Miss Hobart's room, that had preceded it. Lucile had many a sharp fight with her unruly tongue, and often surprised the girls by suddenly stopping in the middle of some angry speech, and begin to whisper, "X—Am I in the right?" etc. At first she had run out of the room when she felt her temper rising, but that had only given the impression that she was angrier than need be, and hurt the girls' feelings. She won many battles over herself by Miss Hobart's simple device of an algebraic equation, which compelled her to stop and think before speaking.

Although the winter was still in its prime, the girls had begun to form summer plans. One of these was that Ellen should go home with Lucile for a visit at the close of school. The necessary letters of invitation had passed from Lucile's father, enclosing a cordial little note from Mrs. Wentworth to Ellen's parents, and to the girls' great joy, the desired permission was given. The two spent many happy hours in talking over how they should spend the interval of Ellen's visit, and in descriptions of Lucile's home and friends.

CHAPTER XIX

MABEL GORING

THE days hurried by. Spring came early that year and the girls took many long rambles out into the country, teeming with budding life, fragrant with odors of fresh-turned earth and of growing things. Lucile was very happy. There was really only one drawback to her content. Mabel Goring all winter had been Lucile's acknowledged enemy, and had constantly annoyed her with covert acts of meanness, or had misconstrued some action of hers, thereby often putting Lucile in a false light to the other girls. Lucile was too proud to explain away these misunderstandings, and was at times sorely misjudged by her mates. Indeed, if it had not been for Ellen's loyalty, and her readiness to set right all difficulties, Lucile might have lost the popularity that her cheerful disposition and kindness of heart had gained for her.

Therefore, she was greatly and rather disagreeably surprised one day when Mabel Goring came to her room during visiting hour, to ask a favor.

Ellen had gone out driving with Mrs. West. True to his word, the senator had sent his wife to call upon Ellen. She had been very kind, and was lavish in invitations to go driving, attend concerts, and occasionally, when Miss Hobart permitted, to dine with her, Lucile being often included in the party. Lucile had not gone to-day, being housed with a cold. She was alone in her room, hastening to complete the copying of her contribution to the school paper, which was to be handed in that evening.

"May I come in?" asked Mabel hesitatingly, pausing in the open doorway.

"Oh, come in, Mabel, if you'll excuse me for just five minutes," replied Lucile, glancing up from her desk absently. She scribbled on for a page or two, then with a final flourish and blot, laid down the pen with a relieved, "There now." Looking up, she saw to her surprise that Mabel had closed the door behind her upon entering.

"Excuse me," she said again. "I just had to finish my paper. They must be handed in to-night, you know. I suppose you finished yours long ago?" she added politely.

"Yes, last week," answered Mabel quickly, and then she stopped. She had taken her hand-

kerchief from her pocket and sat twitching it nervously.

"Did you want to see me about anything?" asked Lucile after a pause, spent in wondering why Mabel had thus sought her out.

"I—I want to ask a big favor of you," said Mabel haltingly. "I want to know if you will lend me some money."

"Lend you some money!" exclaimed Lucile in astonishment. "What for?"

"To pay a bill."

"But why don't you take the bill to Miss Hobart to pay and let her charge it on your account, the way she always does?" asked Lucile.

Mabel blushed and hung her head.

"I don't want her to see—to give her this bill," she stammered. "It isn't for anything wrong," she added hastily, seeing the expression on Lucile's face. "But I bought something that cost more than papa had said I might spend for it. I couldn't help it, I couldn't get anything nice for the amount he said I might spend," she said defiantly. "I thought I could save up the rest out of my allowance—or—or something. But now the bill's come and I can't pay it."

"But Miss Hobart doesn't like the girls to lend money to each other," said Lucile frankly.

"She needn't know. I'll pay you back the very first thing next month, just as soon as I get my allowance. I promise."

"Oh, it isn't that!" exclaimed Lucile. She was vexed to think that Mabel should put down her hesitation to the fear of the debt's not being paid. "Of course I know you'll pay me back, but——"

"You needn't say you haven't got it," interrupted Mabel in the forward manner that had first gained her Lucile's dislike. "I mean," she went on hastily, seeing her mistake, "I heard you telling Hetty this morning that your father had sent you ten dollars to buy an Easter present."

She did not say that she also knew that Miss Hobart had already cashed the check for her.

"Yes, I have the money," answered Lucile coldly.

She was sorely puzzled as to what she ought to do. Miss Hobart did not like the girls to borrow from one another, she knew. Indeed, borrowing or lending had been absolutely forbidden. Still, it seemed mean to refuse to help Mabel out of her difficulty when she had the means to do so.

"Perhaps if I do this favor for her, she will get to like me more," she reflected. "And then, if Miss Hobart did learn that I'd done it, she

wouldn't blame me if she knew I did it in the hope of being able to make up with Mabel."

She rose, after a moment's hesitation, crossed to the bureau and took out her pocket-book, from which she extracted two five-dollar notes—those delightful, crisp, clean bills that one always gets in Washington. "How much do you want?" she asked, turning with the money in her hand.

Mabel glanced longingly at the notes.

"Can you let me have five dollars?" she asked.

Lucile looked surprised. She thought that a good deal of money for Mabel to have spent in excess of an amount allowed. But she handed her one of the bills without a word.

Mabel took it with many profuse expressions of thanks.

"And you—you won't say anything about it?" she asked, turning back at the door.

"No, of course not," replied Lucile testily. She absent-mindedly tossed the remaining note on the top of her bureau and then forgot all about it as Hetty's face appeared over Mabel's shoulder, begging her to come down to the gymnasium.

Several days after this, Miss Hobart read the advertisement of a concert that was to be given

the following week, in which several famous singers were to take part. As was usual upon such occasions, Miss Hobart offered to engage seats for those of the girls who wished to attend. Lucile and Mabel Goring were among the first to request their names put down for tickets. Lucile's kindness to Mabel had produced even greater results than she had expected in the way of making up. Indeed, Mabel clung so closely to her now, assuming an intimacy entirely one-sided, that Lucile felt annoyed and at times almost regretted her generosity.

"May I sit next to you at the concert?" asked Mabel, coming up to Lucile and tucking her hand into her arm. The girls stood in groups about the hall, having just come in from their walk.

"Oh, I suppose so," replied Lucile not any too graciously, and consoling herself with the reflection that Ellen would sit on her other side.

But to her surprise, Ellen did not ask for a ticket. Miss Hobart was writing down the names of those desiring concert tickets, and receiving the money for them.

"Ellen, I suppose," said Miss Hobart as a matter of course, for Ellen was passionately fond of music. But, "No, Miss Hobart," came her reply, to everyone's surprise.

Lucile was standing on the stairs, having started up to get her pocketbook. She turned quickly and gave an astonished, disappointed look toward her friend. Ellen's face was flushed and she looked pained and embarrassed. What she had said about sending all her spare pocket-money to her brother flashed into Lucile's recollection.

"Oh, I see," she thought, flashing Ellen a quick, sympathetic smile as she hurried away. "Ellen's sent all her allowance to her brother. That is probably what she was doing yesterday when Mabel and I came into the room when she was writing. I thought I caught a glimpse of some money, but she hurried her letter out of sight so, I couldn't be sure."

Lucile was gone up-stairs so long, that nearly all the girls had paid Miss Hobart and gone to their rooms when she returned. Only Mabel, who had waited to ask Miss Hobart something about the history lesson, remained.

"Miss Hobart, will you please put down the amount of my ticket on my account?" asked Lucile quietly.

It was not an unusual request. Ordinarily the girls were supposed to pay for such things out of their allowance, but Mr. Wentworth had been particularly anxious that Lucile should profit by

every opportunity to attend all instructive lectures and high-class entertainments and at the beginning of the term had written to Miss Hobart to see that his daughter missed none of the music or lecture courses of the winter, the tickets for any such to be put down as extras on her account. So that Miss Hobart made her note without noticing anything out of the way, and then went on marking out Mabel's history lesson.

But Lucile returned to her books with a mind full of worry. The five-dollar bill with which she had intended to pay for her concert ticket was not in her purse. She had not needed money since the day of her lending some to Mabel, but she could not remember what she had done with the other bill. She had given her bureau a hurried vain search, but then, the bill could easily have slipped into a corner and been overlooked. Nevertheless, she felt vaguely uneasy.

"A penny for your thoughts," said a voice close to her elbow. "You go along as if you were trying to guess the Sphinx's riddle."

Lucile frowned and turned away.

"Maybe I was," she returned coolly.

But Mabel was not easily snubbed, as Lucile was aware from past trials.

"Isn't it funny that Ellen's not going to the

concert?" she observed, linking her arm familiarly into Lucile's.

"I don't think it's funny at all. I think it's too bad, and I shall be bored to death."

"That's a compliment to me, when I asked to sit next you."

Lucile was about to make a rude retort, but checked herself quickly.

"I beg your pardon," she forced herself to say, "I only meant that I'm awfully disappointed."

"Why don't you invite her to go with you, and give her a treat on that five dollars?" suggested Mabel.

Lucile felt unaccountably annoyed at this introduction of the worrying subject but she concealed her feelings.

"I don't think Ellen would like to accept," she said gently.

"No, of course not," rejoined Mabel impatiently, "when she has money of her own and is too stingy to spend it."

"She's not stingy!" flashed out Lucile indignantly.

"What do you call it then? You saw as plainly as I did that money she hid in her desk when we went into the room yesterday."

"I didn't see any money plainly. Indeed, I am not sure that it was money at all."

"I am," persisted Mabel. "It was a five-dollar bill, I saw it distinctly. It was a silver certificate, just like that one you had in your purse the day you lent me some money," she added, giving Lucile a peculiar look. "By the way," she went on after a pause, as Lucile did not answer, and lowering her voice, "do you know whether any of the girls have missed anything lately?"

Lucile stopped short and eyed her companion squarely. Mabel was regarding with great interest an ink-stain on her handkerchief.

"Why?" asked Lucile sharply. "Have you been missing anything?"

Mabel reddened and laughed a little foolishly.

"Why, you know, I haven't anything to miss," she said, "And won't have till the first of the month. I meant—I thought I'd heard some of the girls saying—that is—oh, there goes the study bell," she cried, interrupting herself. She hurried away to her own room before Lucile could inquire the meaning of her very confused sentence, or rather, beginnings of sentences.

Ellen was busy with her practising after study hour and so Lucile chose that time to search for

her missing bill. But the most careful taking out and going over of each bureau drawer in turn failed to bring the vanished money to light. What could have become of it? Lucile went over in her mind all that she had done on the day that Mabel had come to her to borrow the five dollars. Where had she put the remaining note? She remembered that, in her usual careless fashion, she had failed to put it back into her purse. Could she have carried it absent-mindedly with her into the gymnasium, and laid it down somewhere? But no, five-dollar bills weren't the sort of thing to lie around unnoticed. One of the girls would have been sure to see it and trace its owner.

It might have blown out of the window if it were open, but that was hardly likely as Lucile's bureau was some distance away from either window. She was positive that she had not spent it, but looked over her account book to make sure and then emptied all her pockets to see if she had by any chance, tucked it away in one of them. But the money was now here to be found.

Then all at once, as she paused in front of her bureau, the articles which usually stood upon it all piled confusedly upon chairs or the floor, the question that Mabel Goring had asked flashed

across her mind. Had any of the girls been missing things lately? And with that thought another, a mean, cruel little thought that tucked itself into her mind and lay there, and, like a little seed, however unwelcome, took root and grew slowly, steadily, like a poisonous plant; a thought which those other words of Mabel's had planted there—as Mabel had intended they should.

"It was a silver certificate, just like the one you put back in your purse, the day you lent me some money," Mabel had said. The words kept repeating themselves in Lucile's mind, and she could not forget them, try as she would.

"Why shouldn't it be a silver certificate?" she asked herself defiantly. "Surely there are enough of them made!"

She began to put back the things on her bureau. It occurred to her that Mabel had pretty sharp eyes to have noticed all the details concerning the bill that Lucile had not been certain was money at all. Just then Ellen came into the room.

"Why, what's the matter, Lucile?" she asked cheerily, surveying the confusion, "House-cleaning?"

"No, I—I was looking for something," answered Lucile, her face flushing guiltily.

"Have you found it? May I help?" Ellen laid down her music and came over to assist Lucile in tidying up her bureau. She was full of interest in a new piece of music that she had been practising, and began relating how pained her professor had been at the last lesson, when she made a trifling mistake.

In laughing over the fussy little man's peculiarities, Lucile forgot, for a time, her worries, but the sight of Mabel at the dinner-table glancing significantly first toward Ellen, then toward herself, and finally arching her eyebrows and looking quickly away, irritated her beyond expression, for she could not help guessing what was in the other's thoughts.

"Did you notice Mabel Goring making those great cat's eyes at us during dinner?" laughed Ellen as she and Lucile walked up and down the hall that evening, arms clasping waists schoolgirl fashion.

"Cat's eyes—that's just what they are! She's a horrid, spiteful little cat!" burst out Lucile resentfully.

Ellen looked mildly surprised.

"Don't be too hard on her," she said soothingly. "I know you don't like her, and she is a little difficult to get on with, but she seems to

have grown awfully fond of you, Lucile. You've been so nice to her lately that I thought you'd made up."

"Made up! I dislike her more than ever!" groaned Lucile miserably. "And, oh, Ellen, I do feel so upset about something. It's nothing at all, really, you know, only I feel—well, I feel cross," she finished with a rueful laugh. "I just can't play 'Twenty Questions' to-night. Won't you tell the girls that I've got a headache and have gone to lie down?"

"Oh, you poor, dear girl! Do let me come up with you and bathe your head, or read you to sleep."

"No, no, thanks," replied Lucile hastily. "I wouldn't spoil the evening for you."

"It wouldn't spoil the evening. I'd lots rather stay with you," said Ellen wistfully.

"No, no, I'd rather be alone," responded Lucile truthfully, and hurried away up-stairs.

CHAPTER XX

MISS JONES AS A CONFIDANT

ELLEN looked after her friend with troubled eyes. She knew that something was bothering Lucile, and felt a trifle hurt that she had not been taken into her confidence.

"Perhaps she will tell me. I'm sure she will as soon as she can," she thought, as she turned away to join the other girls.

It was Friday night and as there were no lessons to prepare for the morrow, the girls always had the evening to themselves. They were all disappointed at Lucile's desertion of the game, for she was generally the moving spirit among them. But they were sorry for her headache and did not suggest going after her to bring her back, as Ellen had feared they might.

Lucile's headache was not altogether assumed. Her brain throbbed with a sense of pain and she felt feverish and nervous. What could Mabel mean by talking that way, and what ground had she for her actions? Did she suspect anything?

Did she know that Ellen wanted money? For that Ellen saved every possible penny out of her allowance to send her brother, Ellen herself had told her. But to take money that was not her own—even if she found it! Ellen would never do that! The note might have blown off Lucile's bureau; might even have blown across the room among Ellen's belongings. But Ellen would not have kept it. She would have known that it was not hers.

Still, the money was gone, and Lucile could not explain the mystery of its disappearance. She went into her room—the room shared by herself and Ellen, and filled with such pleasant associations. She did not strike a light but made her way across the room to the window and stood looking out. It was not a cheerful scene that met her eyes. The school was situated in that part of the town known as the new part: the "New Northwest" the girls had nicknamed it. The houses were few and far apart and the grass-grown vacant lots that gaped between were ragged and ugly.

But Lucile was not looking at the view. She drummed absently on the glass with her fingertips, her gaze fixed vacantly upon the gas-lamp at the corner. The laughter of the girls came

up to her at intervals. Once she thought she detected the sound of Mabel's nasal tones, and she frowned.

At length she turned away from the casement with the air of sudden resolve, and, the worried look still in her eyes, left the room again. Ascending to the floor above, she made her way down the hall and knocked at a closed door, from beneath which a bright, thin gleam of light told that it was occupied.

Miss Jones's pleasant voice called, "Come in," and Lucile entered. She paused on the threshold as Miss Jones looked up from her writing.

"Why, Lucile, what is it?" she exclaimed, at sight of the girl's flushed, troubled face.

Lucile hesitated and looked down.

"I thought I'd come and talk to you a little while, if you weren't busy," she said slowly.

Miss Jones, who had risen, laid aside her papers and pulled forward two easy chairs.

"I'm not busy at all," she said cheerily. "I was only correcting grammar papers and there is plenty of time for that before Monday. But why aren't you with the girls?"

"I didn't feel like playing games to-night," replied Lucile, seating herself in the low wicker chair. "I've got a sort of headache and—and

'Twenty Questions' is a stupid game," she finished lamely. She had been going to say, "and I'm so worried," but checked herself. She wasn't at all sure yet whether she wanted to tell Miss Jones about the lost money and all her worries concerning it. After all, there really was so little to tell.

Miss Jones noticed that everything was not as it should be with her favorite pupil, but she asked no questions and began to talk upon some general topic. She preferred that, if Lucile had anything to tell, she should say it of her own free will.

Lucile sat well forward in her chair, her face resting in her hands, her elbows leaning on her knees and her gaze fixed upon vacancy, replying in monosyllables to Miss Jones's efforts at conversation.

At last she burst out, all unconsciously interrupting her teacher in the middle of a speech.

"Miss Jones," she began, "I'd like to talk to you about something. There isn't anything to tell—there really isn't anything to say, only—I'm so—so bothered." She paused a moment and then continued :

"I don't know just what to say," she said looking up, "I'm so afraid that if I put it into

words, it will sound so much worse than it is. Do you understand ? ”

“ I think I see what you mean,” replied Miss Jones readily. “ Something is worrying you that you would like to get off your mind, and yet it is such a little thing in itself that there doesn’t seem to be words simple enough to express exactly what you feel.”

“ That’s just it ! ” cried Lucile with a sigh of relief. “ How did you ever understand so perfectly without really knowing ? ”

Miss Jones smiled.

“ I’ve felt that way so often myself,” she answered quietly.

“ Really, Miss Jones ? You mean that you really feel sometimes as if you’d like to talk things over with somebody ? ”

“ Certainly I do, very often. Why not ? ”

“ I don’t know. You seem so contented and cheerful always. And you help the girls to decide things so quickly and easily that I shouldn’t think you’d ever have any trouble deciding questions of your own. I’m sure I wouldn’t if I were as clever.”

Miss Jones smiled at the frank compliment but became grave again immediately.

“ I often long for sympathy and encourage-

ment," she said gently. "But tell me what it is that is bothering you," she added brightly. "Perhaps the very putting of it into words will show you how small and useless a worry it was. Maybe the simplest little words you can think of to describe it, will make the bother swell out so big to fill them properly that, like the frog in the fable who tried to be like the bull, it will burst."

"How cleverly you put things," cried Lucile admiringly. "You ought to write a book, Miss Jones."

"How do you know I don't intend to, someday," exclaimed Miss Jones impulsively. "Perhaps I've already started it!"

"Oh, Miss Jones! Not really and truly! Will you let me see it, sometime? What is it about?" cried Lucile excitedly, her mind quite carried away from her own distressing thoughts. "You will let me see it, won't you?"

"Why, yes, perhaps—sometime," answered her teacher, half repenting the sudden confidence. "If you will promise to say nothing about it to anyone. But you did not come here to talk about me," she added quickly. Lucile's interest pleased her, but she disliked talking of her own affairs.

"Well, I'll do as you say, and shame the little worry out of existence by putting it into words,"

said Lucile, growing serious again. "I'll begin at the beginning and tell straight through, just the facts as they happened, and then you will tell me what to do.

"Some time ago, just after Easter," Lucile went on in a quick, low voice, "Mabel Goring came to me and borrowed five dollars. Yes, I know it was against the rules, but Mabel wanted the money so badly. She knew I had some, for I'd just received a present of ten dollars from father that very morning. I reminded her that Miss Hobart didn't like the girls to borrow or lend, but—but she wanted it awfully and I didn't know how to refuse.

"There were two five-dollar bills in my purse. I took them out and gave one to Mabel. Just then one of the girls called to me to go down to the gym and I went off with her. And now, I don't know where I put that other five-dollar bill and I can't find it! I didn't miss it until to-day and I can't remember a single thing about it, or what I did with it."

"You mean," interrupted Miss Jones in an anxious voice, "that you have lost the other five-dollar bill?"

"Yes. At least, I can't find it. I don't believe I could have put it in my purse again. I

must have forgotten about it and it has gotten lost somehow. Perhaps it blew out the window."

"I think you ought to go to Miss Hobart about this," began Miss Jones.

"But there's more," went on Lucile hurriedly, "and this is the hard part to tell—I mean to express rightly. But there," she added, "as I think of it now, and of words to tell it in, the whole thing is silly and impossible, just as you said. But I'll tell you anyway, now I've started, just to get the horrid little pain out of my heart. You know when Miss Hobart was taking down our names for the concert tickets to-day, Ellen said she wasn't going. Then Mabel came up while I was going up-stairs and began talking about it. She said it seemed queer that Ellen shouldn't want to go to such a good concert when she had money to pay for her ticket. Then she reminded me of how, a few days before, we had come into the room when Ellen was writing and she had hidden the letter at once. I thought I saw some money with the letter, but wasn't at all sure. But Mabel says that she saw the money plainly, and that it was a five-dollar bill, and then she added, in such a sly, hinting way, Miss Jones, that the bill was a silver certificate, just like mine! And then she asked me if I knew

whether any of the girls had missed anything lately."

Miss Jones's face grew very grave. The recollection flashed through her mind of Mabel's own loss the previous autumn, and of how she had tried then to lay the blame of it upon Lucile.

"Then she began hinting at things," went on Lucile. "Making horrid little speeches with a double meaning, and all through dinner she kept making eyes, first at Ellen and then at me, until I was ready to cry, I was so provoked. I couldn't help guessing what she was thinking about and what she was trying to make me think. Then, though I knew perfectly well that—that everything's all right, still," Lucile hesitated and stopped. Not even to deny it, could she utter the cruel accusation against Ellen that Mabel's behavior would have her believe.

"I know Ellen wants all the money she can save," she admitted after a pause. "I can't tell you any more than that, without betraying Ellen's secret, but I believe that she's saved all her allowance for some other purpose and that's the reason she hadn't any money to pay for a concert ticket. But Mabel's horrid words and actions did exasperate me so, I just had to talk it all over

with some one, Miss Jones. What would you advise me to do? Go to Ellen and tell her all about it? Because while of course I don't need to have her deny anything of the sort—it's perfectly absurd to think of such a thing—still, I don't want to think that Mabel has any excuse to think such things."

"You are quite right. But perhaps we may be able to find the explanation ourselves. What did Mabel mean by asking you whether any one had missed anything? Did she know that your money was gone? Or had she lost anything herself?"

"She couldn't have known that I'd lost any money, for I'd only just missed it myself, and when I asked her if she'd lost any, she said she hadn't any to lose, and ran off."

Miss Jones rose.

"I think, Lucile, that you and I would better go to Miss Hobart at once. But I think it is only fair to tell you," she added, pausing at the door and turning back; "that Miss Hobart has been seriously worried about certain matters for some time past, and perhaps what you have just told me may help her to clear things up. If so, you will hear all about it. Please tell Miss Hobart plainly, all that happened in regard to

this money matter, and do not hold anything back. Don't be afraid to tell her that you lent Mabel the money. She will not scold under the circumstances, I feel sure."

"All right," replied Lucile, wonderingly, as they moved together toward the door.

But just then a hurried knock was heard and the maid opened the door to say that they were both to accompany her, at once, to Miss Hobart's study.

CHAPTER XXI

MABEL LEAVES SCHOOL

LUCILE was astonished and puzzled at the summons. Filled with wonder she followed her teacher and the maid down-stairs. Miss Hobart was seated at her desk, her face wearing an expression of such deep pain that Lucile's heart throbbed with pity. Mabel Goring sat near by, her eyes red and swollen with crying and her handkerchief twisted into a damp, dingy ball between her hands. Lucile recognized the position as exactly the one which Mabel had assumed on the morning that Lucile had been brought to account for her handling of the other's pocket-book.

"I suppose Miss Hobart has found out about my lending Mabel the money," she thought, "but I didn't think she'd feel as badly about it as that. Well, I'm in for it now," and then was astonished to hear Miss Hobart say :

"This is Lucile Wentworth, Mr. Goring."

Lucile turned and beheld a small, dark man

sitting near the door. His little black eyes gleamed with anger under their frowning brows, and the lines about his thin-lipped mouth were hard and cruel.

"Oh, dear," thought Lucile in dismay, a sudden lump rising in her throat, "Miss Hobart has sent for Mabel's father! Then it must be something worse than borrowing money."

There was a pause. Mr. Goring had acknowledged Miss Hobart's introduction by a slight bow but no one spoke. At last Miss Hobart broke the awkward silence.

"Lucile," she said quietly, "have you missed any money lately?"

"Why, yes—that is, I mislaid some," stammered Lucile, completely taken by surprise.

"Why do you say that you mislaid it?"

"Why, because—because I took it out of my purse and put it down somewhere, and when I wanted it to-day I couldn't find it."

"How did you happen to take it out of your purse?"

Lucile flushed and hesitated. Then, in obedience to a look from Miss Jones she repeated the whole story of her interview with Mabel, the lending of the five dollars and her forgetting to replace the other note.

"And you did not Miss the money until to-day?" asked Miss Hobart.

"No, Miss Hobart. I hadn't needed it before."

"Have you any reason to think that some one might have taken it?" Miss Hobart asked this question slowly, eying Lucile closely the while.

A startled look came into the girl's eyes. She opened her lips to speak, checked herself, stood thinking a moment and then, raising her head, looked quietly at the principal and said firmly:

"I do not believe that any one has taken my money."

Miss Jones, knowing that in Lucile's mind was the suspicion concerning Ellen that she now supposed shared by Miss Hobart, glowed with pride at Lucile's loyalty to her friend. And with this question of Ellen's honesty solely occupying her mind, Lucile was utterly unprepared for what followed.

"Your money was taken, Lucile. Mabel has confessed," said Miss Hobart in a low voice.

"My money taken! Mabel confessed! Why, what do you mean?" she cried, gazing from one to the other of the faces about her.

Mabel hung her head and began to sob. Mr. Goring ground his teeth and folded his arms

grimly. He was suffering an agony of mortification.

"I feel that it is your right to know the truth," continued Miss Hobart, "for, from something Mabel said, I fear that you may have been led to suspect some one else in connection with your loss."

"But I didn't suspect any one, Miss Hobart," exclaimed Lucile, clasping her hands in her earnestness. "I talked to Miss Jones about it, but I didn't really think it of Ellen, did I, Miss Jones?"

"I am very glad," replied Miss Hobart with a warm smile, "that your loyalty to your friend was untouched, for I am aware that you know how ardently Ellen longs for money with which to help her brother."

"Yes, Miss Hobart. But I think you have made a mistake about Mabel," continued Lucile eagerly. "She borrowed the money of me, and I lent it to her willingly. She didn't take it, Miss Hobart, I lent it," she repeated insistently, reading the expression on her teacher's face.

Mr. Goring bit his lip in silent wrath. He would now have to listen to a repetition of his daughter's disgrace, this time to satisfy the curiosity of a schoolgirl. In this he did Lucile's unwillingness to believe a great injustice.

"I am sorry to say, Lucile, that not only did Mabel borrow one five-dollar bill from you, but that she took the other."

"Miss Hobart!" ejaculated Lucile, and then could say no more.

She could not believe her senses. Mabel Goring had stolen! She was a thief! Oh, it was too dreadful to believe. There must be some other explanation. She turned to Mabel eagerly, to beg her to explain away this misunderstanding. But something in her school-mate's face, in her crouched attitude, made her hesitate. She gazed at her for a moment, then turned to Mr. Goring, who, in his anger and mortification, could not meet her eyes.

"Oh, Miss Hobart," she said, almost in a whisper, "is it true?"

"Yes, Lucile, it is true," repeated Miss Hobart sadly. "We thought it best, as I said, that you should know. But I trust that you will regard this knowledge as the most sacred confidence."

"Yes, Miss Hobart, of course!"

Lucile crossed the room and stood beside Miss Jones. Her natural delicacy of feeling forbade her to look at Mabel again—she must feel too ashamed. But Mabel, only ashamed that she

had been found out, put a different meaning to the action. "It was just like the 'stuck-up prig'," she told herself, "to turn her back on her now that she had gotten into trouble!"

"Here, Lucile," continued Miss Hobart after a painful pause, "Mr. Goring wishes to pay back everything that has been—been taken." She laid two five-dollar notes on the table. "Miss Jones," she added, turning to her, "it seems that the brooch, with other small articles taken in the winter, has been sold. But they can be recovered, and——"

"Oh, Miss Hobart," Miss Jones was beginning, but Miss Hobart checked her and went on:

"Everything will be returned to those who suffered losses. Mr. Goring wishes it. Mabel will go home, of course."

"Not home!" interrupted Mr. Goring harshly. "She'll go to the Reform School. That's the place for her, and such as her; disgracing a man's name and ruining his reputation!"

Lucile started and shuddered visibly. It was the first time that Mr. Goring had spoken since she entered the room. What a voice! Hard, vicious, cruel! Poor Mabel, to have such a father! No wonder she had done wrong!

A painful silence followed Mr. Goring's speech and then Miss Hobart said pleadingly :

"I hope—I trust that you do not mean that, Mr. Goring. I fear that such a—a punishment would only do further harm."

"I must beg to be allowed to do as I think best with my own child," he replied rising. "Come, Mabel, get ready to leave."

Mabel rose and left the room silently. Lucile moved forward, as if to follow her, paused and then, prompted by the recollection of Mr. Goring's cruel words, said falteringly :

"Might I go and—and help her put her things together?"

But Miss Hobart shook her head, and no one spoke or moved again until Mabel reappeared, her hat and gloves on, carrying her satchel. Mr. Goring took the valise, addressed a few low-spoken words to Miss Hobart as he shook hands, bowed stiffly to Miss Jones and Lucile, then hurriedly left the room, closely followed by Mabel. She had not spoken a single farewell to any one, but went out after her father without a word.

The three left in the study looked at one another with mingled feelings.

"How did it come about?" asked Miss Jones at length.

Miss Hobart sighed, wearily.

"I found certain money, which I was able to identify, in her possession," she replied sadly. "No, you needn't go, dear," laying a detaining hand on her arm as Lucile was about to leave the room, "as you know so much, you might as well hear the whole story.

"We, Miss Jones and I, have feared something of this sort for some time past," she continued, "but of course could say nothing until we were sure.

"To go back to the beginning," she interrupted herself to say, turning to Miss Jones, "it was that locked satchel of Mabel's over which I sprained my ankle, which gave me the first clue. Two or three days after the accident, Mabel asked to be allowed to carry some things to the cleaner's. As I often let the girls go on small errands by themselves, I gave her permission, and noticed, when she started, that she carried that satchel. Mary Harrison had come to me privately, the next morning after her burglar fright, to tell me of several things, of greater or less value, that she had missed off her dressing-table. I can't explain why, but the sight of that satchel aroused a suspicion, vague and undefined at the time, in my mind. Shortly after this Mabel purchased

an expensive hat and several pairs of gloves. In two weeks another girl came to me in tears and distress, having lost a sum of money and a large solid silver picture frame which she prized highly. Again Mabel came to me for permission to go alone on an errand, this time to have a pair of shoes mended. And again, she carried the satchel. The next day several of the girls, Mabel among them, went shopping with mademoiselle, and Mabel appeared at dinner in a handsome new silk waist. Knowing that her allowance was not large, and receiving no bill for these articles, to put to her account, I wondered how she had managed to pay for them.

“ Gradually, day by day, my suspicions grew. I came to believe that Mabel was responsible for the various missing articles, and that she disposed of them in the city, carrying them away from the school in her satchel. I took Miss Jones into my confidence. We learned that Mabel had borrowed a good deal of money from time to time of the different girls, under bond of strictest secrecy, and it was always after that that the lender missed other money—just as your other five-dollar bill disappeared after having lent one to Mabel.

“ But, though we felt almost certain by this

time, we could find no means of fixing the guilt. Realizing the necessity of knowing at once, I marked certain bills and put them in a drawer of my desk where I am in the habit of keeping change and from which various sums of money had vanished. Two of the three marked bills were gone the next time I opened the drawer. Yesterday I went into Mabel's room and found those bills in her purse!"

Lucile gave a sharp cry of distress.

"Of course," went on Miss Hobart after a pause, "of course it was a shock to me in spite of all my suspicions. I did not speak to Mabel then, but wrote at once to her father. He arrived to-night and Mabel made a full confession to us."

"Poor Mabel, she must be very unhappy!" said Miss Jones softly.

Lucile burst into tears. Much as she had disliked her school-mate, the news of her disgrace and guilt were a great shock.

The girls marveled greatly at Mabel's sudden departure. They were told that her father had taken her home, and guessed at some trouble. But the facts were never revealed, and Lucile guarded her share in the secret so well that no one, not even Ellen, suspected that she knew more than any of the rest.

The school term glided on, peacefully and uneventfully, to its close. The May days were warm and enervating. Lessons dragged, and the girls' minds were filled with thoughts of the coming holidays. Ellen was to go direct from school for her visit with Lucile and the two girls were never tired, Ellen of listening, Lucile of telling of the good times they were to have together.

Examinations were finally over, and the long-looked-for last day, with its exercises and farewell luncheon, arrived. Lucile and Ellen were to be among the first to leave, early next morning, and to their room flocked the others on the last afternoon. Already things were different. No bells echoed through the house, and the girls were allowed to go where and when they pleased. Discipline was abandoned.

"I declare," laughed Mary Harrison, appearing at Lucile's door at the astonishing hour of five, usually sacred to study, "I felt like walking backward all the way, to see if mademoiselle were watching. What larks to be loafing in study hour."

"What slang," exclaimed Hetty. "Holiday faults beginning to creep out already."

"It's great to be able to say what we like

without reproofs or marks," said Lucile. "But do you know," she added seriously. "I am almost sorry to go."

"I like that—almost sorry!" echoed an indignant chorus.

"You all know what I mean. Of course I'll miss you girls awfully. That goes without saying. What I am 'almost sorry' to leave is the school itself; the dear, stupid routine day after day. It was sort of home-y, you know."

"But we'll have our own homes!" cried Hetty joyously. "I shan't miss the school a bit, though I'll just die for you other girls. You're lucky to take Ellen home with you, Lucile. I think it's great fun to have girls visit you."

"I'm glad we are all to come back in the autumn," said Ellen softly.

But Lucile turned away without speaking. Hetty's words, "we shall have our own homes," rang in her ears. Would she be glad to see her home in its new aspect?

CHAPTER XXII

MRS. WENTWORTH

THE day of departure came at last, and such a turmoil as accompanied it! Such a scramble to get last articles into trunks before the expressman came, or unlocking them again to slip in something overlooked in packing. There were last words to be spoken, addresses and promises to write to exchange and a final narration by each of summer plans.

Lucile and Ellen departed joyfully, the envy of those who were not taking a friend home for the holidays. Lucile's farewell to Miss Jones was brief, for the latter had received and accepted an invitation to visit Mrs. Wentworth during the summer, greatly to Lucile's delight.

It was a hot day for a railroad journey but the girls did not mind and sat laughing and chatting over a box of chocolates—so long a forbidden luxury. They fairly revelled in their freedom and the other passengers forgot for a time the heat and dust in watching the whole-hearted enjoyment of these two merry schoolgirls.

If Lucile felt any nervousness over the approaching meeting with her stepmother, she did not show it. After retiring the night before, in describing to Ellen, for about the twentieth time, the exact appearance of the Wentworth house and grounds, she had stopped suddenly, struck by the thought that possibly Mrs. Wentworth had altered the arrangement of the house; possibly she had abolished the dear old school-room, no longer a necessity now that Lucile was away.

"It would be just like her to have it turned into a sitting-room for her own use," she reflected hotly, and all her old prejudices came surging back upon her. She had lain awake long after the usual hour of sleep, speculating as to the look of her home under its new mistress. But to-day she could not think beyond the fact that the holidays had come and she was going home.

Mr. Wentworth met them at the station with the carriage. After a few gravely cordial words, he put the two girls into the carriage to drive home while he returned to his office. Lucile hung out the carriage window the whole way, in radiant excitement, keeping up an uninterrupted chatter concerning the people and places they passed.

"There's Mr. Jones, the baker. He has awfully good sponge cakes. And I declare, Howell's candy store has moved. What a fine place they've got now! And an ice-cream parlor, Ellen," she added over her shoulder.

"There," she ejaculated the next instant, "there are two of the girls going in. Oh, I wish they'd look around." She began to wave frantically. Pshaw! I can't make them see!"

"Which are they?" asked Ellen, leaning over Lucile's shoulder interestedly, for she knew all of Lucile's friends by name.

"Nan Campbell and Gladys Hurst. Nan's fly-away and gushy but awfully nice. Gladys is nice too, only more dignified and proper. She and Nan are a perfect contrast but great chums. I should think they'd fight, they have such different ideas about things, but they're always together."

They drove rapidly on, passing through the business portion of the town to where the street broadened and the houses were farther apart.

"We've turned into our street!" cried Lucile presently.

"Oh!" cried Ellen from the opposite window, giving Lucile's hand an ecstatic squeeze as the carriage passed through an open gateway.

"We're there, aren't we, dear? I'm sure I recognize it!"

"Yes, we're here, we're here!" and Lucile thrust her head far out of the window to take a rapid survey of the beautiful sloping lawn and the large house at its head.

"Nothing changed on the outside, anyhow," she said to herself with a relieved sigh, and feasted her eyes on the dear outlines of "Home."

The house was of generous proportions, old Colonial in architecture, and the white pillars of the portico gleamed brightly in the summer sunshine against the background of yellow brick. Filmy white draperies waved behind open windows and Lucile's big collie dog, Mac, lay at the top of the steps, his ears pricked and his whole tawny self keenly on the alert.

As Lucile looked, the house door opened suddenly and Mrs. Wentworth came out. The driveway was rather a long one and Mrs. Wentworth had heard the crunch of wheels as soon as the carriage entered the gate. But she had not gone to the door immediately. Perhaps her heart too, was beating a little faster in anticipation of this meeting. Lucile drew her head back with a peculiar little "oh" and glancing at Ellen, perceived that she too, had seen.

"How nice of her!" cried Ellen impulsively. "Just as my mother would have done."

Then the carriage drew up at the steps and Mac was leaping and barking, James was shouting to the horses, Mrs. Wentworth was kissing the two girls and all was bustle and confusion.

Presently the hubbub subsided a little and they all went indoors. Lucile was fairly dancing with impatience to be off and away to her own room with Ellen and it was with much inward chafing that she followed her stepmother into the library. Mrs. Wentworth was intent upon making Ellen feel at home, and apparently had no eye for Lucile's ill-concealed vexation. But she guessed it readily enough, and had she yielded to her inclinations would have sent the girls at once to their room.

But that would not have been a right beginning. Mrs. Wentworth realized the task before her. She understood Lucile's passionate, generous character very well. It was not a question of gaining a place in Lucile's good graces. That she could easily accomplish by giving in to all her whims and gratifying her smallest desires. But she wished to win the girl's life-long affection and respect. She feared a struggle, but she would be patient, gentle and hopeful.

So, though it would have been much easier to give Lucile her own way in everything, and to plan one continual round of gayety to enliven the summer holiday, Mrs. Wentworth established a sort of routine for her stepdaughter. She imposed light duties for the mornings, restricted the number of evening parties and was strict in the matter of an early bedtime. Moreover, she made it gently but thoroughly understood that she was mistress of the household, and that while any wishes that Lucile might have in regard to such matters, were carried out as nearly as possible to the letter, the orders were given by Mrs. Wentworth. Withal, she was charming. By nature light-hearted, free from that stiffness of ultra-dignity that is the abomination of the schoolgirl heart, and fond of young people's society, Mrs. Wentworth was very popular among the boys and girls of Lucile's acquaintance. She made a delightful chaperone and her attendance was in demand at all the picnics, river parties and hay-rides.

But Lucile refused to be won over. She chafed under the restraint, and her prejudice refused to admit the justice of her stepmother's discipline. Her home-coming had been marred by a sense of irritation which not even the sight of the dear old schoolroom—unchanged, could appease.



SHE THREW HERSELF ON THE LOUNGE

nd

"I think Mrs. Wentworth is just sweet," declared Ellen enthusiastically, when they were preparing for bed that night.

Lucile threw herself upon the lounge with a scornful sniff.

Her judgment of her stepmother's real character was based upon that morning's incident of the previous summer, concerning which her indignation was still burning.

"And you were awfully nice and polite to her, too, Lucile dear," went on Ellen cheerfully, not hearing the expressive "humph!" She was brushing her hair and the riotous blond masses about her shoulders rendered her for the moment deaf. "It was so kind in you to go into the library and sit down quietly, when all the time you were dying to rush off up here, as I could plainly see."

"How lovely your hair is, Ellen," interrupted Lucile abruptly, springing up and half strangling her friend with an unexpected embrace. "Just let me brush it for you."

Ellen yielded the brush with only a half-spoken protest. She understood and accepted the hint to change her subject.

Ellen's hair was pretty, being gleamingly golden and curly, but it was short and scant, and Lucile's

heavy brown braids had always been her secret envy. Ellen was small and slender and her school-mates had nicknamed her the "mouse." Yet in spite of her tiny figure, there was an air of dignity about her, a certain stateliness of bearing that gave the impression that she was older than her years. Lucile, on the contrary, with her laughing gray eyes, small, dimpled mouth and impetuous manner, was invariably taken for at least two or three years younger than her actual age.

The two friends were a complete contrast, each to the other, in more ways than mere personal appearance, and Mrs. Wentworth reflected upon this as she talked over that first day with her husband. She said a great deal about Ellen and very little about Lucile. Her ardent wish was to bring about a kinder and gentler feeling between Lucile and her father to knit a bond of sympathy between them. Certainly the way to accomplish this would not be to produce a nightly list of Lucile's faults and misdoings. So Mrs. Wentworth undertook the task alone, bravely and cheerfully. She grew honestly fond of Lucile. She admired the girl's sunny nature, her generosity and kind heart. She felt sure that, her prejudice conquered, the girl would yield her affections readily enough.

But that prejudice still remained to be broken down. It reared itself, an unlovely, hideous wall between them. Lucile was compelled to admit the winning charm of Mrs. Wentworth's manner. Yet this very grace and gentleness appeared in the guise of hypocrisy, when the girl recalled the heartlessness which her stepmother displayed in business dealings.

Ellen, as ignorant as Mrs. Wentworth herself as to Lucile's true reason for her prejudice, was disheartened at the state of affairs. Her heart ached for her friend and indeed, in spite of the frequent merry-makings, her visit was not a very comfortable one.

"I feel in the way, somehow," she told herself. "I wonder if Lucile and her mother wouldn't get on better if I weren't here."

Yet she feared to offend Lucile by shortening her visit. The very suggestion of going home called forth such a torrent of protestations, followed by such an agony of reproachful tears, that Ellen had not dared to mention the subject again.

The girls walked and drove, went on picnics and all sorts of gay excursions. Or else they lounged in the cool, breezy schoolroom, and read or talked through the hot, lazy afternoons.

Mrs. Wentworth joined the pleasure parties more often than not, but at home she generally kept aloof from the two girls. She felt that her presence acted as more or less of a restraint upon Lucile. She had not made such rapid strides as she had anticipated toward peaceful relations with her stepdaughter.

Truth to tell, that young lady was not well. She did not know it herself and laid down her more frequent outbursts of temper and constantly growing sense of irritation to the unaccustomed strictness of her home life. Whereas, in point of fact, never did girl have such freedom of time and action. Mrs Wentworth was anxious to make Ellen's visit an agreeable one, and many of the little pleasure parties were planned by herself. One of these excursions, a picnic to a far-distant point up the mountain was at present the subject of eager discussion between Lucile and those of her friends who were invited. Mr. Wentworth had engaged a special car to carry them to the picnic grounds, which were along the line of the railroad. The young people were to spend the whole day in the woods until a return train gathered up their car and them early in the evening. The idea was a charming one, and even Lucile had no fault to find. Even Lucile! Lucile, who had

hitherto been the leader in all festivities, whose spirits were the gayest of the gay, and whose capacity for enjoyment no one could doubt. What had changed her? Why had she allowed her sweet, sunny nature to become moody and fretful? Was there good reason? Was that calm, serene, sweet-voiced woman whom people called her mother—was she to blame?

Lucile had many a conflict with herself. "Why can't I give in and love her, as she is determined I shall do?" she asked herself, wretchedly.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PICNIC

Mrs. Wentworth was writing letters at her desk in the drawing-room. She had placed a low screen between herself and the rest of the room, to keep off the draught that was blowing her papers about. Lucile and Ellen entered presently, and sat down to talk over the letters they had received that morning. Mrs. Wentworth's attention was caught by a name.

"Tom writes that he's got nearly enough money ready to pay his debt!" exclaimed Ellen, looking up from her letter delightedly.

"And then will he tell?" asked Lucile.

"Yes, he'll be free to tell then. I wonder who really was to blame for the hazing. If John Hough had not made Tom promise——"

"Do you think he'll tell, even if he is free?" interrupted Lucile doubtfully.

"Oh, he will! Why, Lucile, it's such a serious charge! It would be his duty to tell, for mamma's sake."

"It is hard to tell on anyone else, though,"

persisted Lucile. "What I can't understand is the boy or boys who did the actual work keeping silent ; those who tied him to the rails."

"If the boy hadn't died—" Ellen was beginning and stopped speaking in astonishment as the screen was pushed aside and Mrs. Wentworth came quickly forward.

"Excuse me, Ellen dear," she exclaimed eagerly. "I couldn't help hearing what you were saying and understanding that your brother has been in some sort of trouble about hazing. Am I right?"

"Yes, he has been in very grave trouble," replied Ellen regarding Mrs. Wentworth's intent face earnestly.

"Was it that dreadful hazing at H—— University, where they tied a boy to the railroad track?"

"Yes," answered Ellen quickly and moving a step forward. If Mrs. Wentworth knew so much about the matter, she might know more. Perhaps she knew who really did the hazing! "Do you know who—who was to blame?" she asked.

Mrs. Wentworth looked down into her anxious, pleading face with smiling tenderness.

"Why, yes, I know," she said. "It was John Hough. Your brother had nothing to do with it

at all. I was visiting in H—— at the time. Almost immediately afterward I went abroad and did not hear how the matter ended. But I never dreamed that John Hough would let suspicion rest upon another boy.”

“He did. My brother has suffered terribly,” said Ellen. “But now—why, he can be freed from that dreadful suspicion! I must write to my mother at once! Oh, Lucile, isn’t it too lovely!” she exclaimed, half laughing and half crying.

She kissed Lucile, and then with a few words of eager gratitude to Mrs. Wentworth, ran out of the room.

Lucile turned away and took up a book with a deliberate ignoring of her stepmother. Mrs. Wentworth stood regarding her intently for a moment and then went quietly back to her desk, adjusting the screen about her as before.

Lucile tossed her book on the table and wandered aimlessly out of the room. It was dull without Ellen and she wondered how long she would be over her letters. She went into the school-room and seated herself at the piano. She lifted the lid and ran her fingers idly over the keys, her eyes gazing dreamily out upon the scene that unrolled itself before the window. Beyond the slop-

ing velvety lawn the hills rose higher and higher until they marked a long purple line across the horizon.

Lucile fell into a reverie. She realized that she was giving a wrong impression of her attitude toward her stepmother. Her friends considered her prejudice childish and unjust. Was it unjust, she wondered. She recalled Mrs. Wentworth's gentleness and patience, her sympathy and eager readiness to help. She pictured her as she had stood in the parlor with Ellen, her strong, sweet face all aglow with the joy of lifting the cloud of sorrow from Ellen's life. Then another picture rose vividly in her mind—a crippled man, a sick woman and four starving, helpless children huddled on a doorstep, the fierce rays of a July sun pouring down upon them and a curious crowd gathered to gaze upon their wretchedness. A woman who could commit an act of that sort deserved neither love nor pity!

"I am in the right, and I shall bear it out," she said bitterly, "even though I may never justify myself in people's eyes."

She struck a few chords on the piano and turned impatiently about on the stool.

"It is very odd," she reflected fretfully, "it is very odd that she should appear so lovable when

at heart she's so hard. But her cruel acts will surely be known some day and then people will see that I am right. As it is now, everybody thinks it is my fault that we don't get on together. Even Miss Jones thinks I'm unreasonable. Well, I can't help it. I don't care ! ”

But she did care very much. It hurt her sense of justice to be misunderstood, and it was doing violence to her own feelings to resist so stubbornly the constant overtures of peace that Mrs. Wentworth offered.

She brooded over the matter until she grew morbid and irritable ; and was prone to sink from heights of excited gayety to depths of sullen gloom.

The day following Mrs. Wentworth's disclosure to Ellen of her brother's innocence was the one set for the picnic up the mountain. A merry crowd of young people assembled at the station, laden with baskets and wraps, in very prompt obedience to Mrs. Wentworth's injunction to be on time. The ride by train was delightful, the breezes growing cooler and spicier as they ascended higher among the hills. Rhododendron Ridge, when they reached it, proved to be rightly named. The rhododendron bushes looked like enormous bouquets with their profusion of deep

crimson, pale pink and mauve blossoms against the rich dark green of their foliage. A dry, shady spot was found for the banquet and the baskets and extra wraps were deposited at the foot of a tree. The young people departed to explore the hill-side and to look for a spring reported to be in the vicinity. Mrs. Wentworth and her companion chaperone, Miss Andrews, settled themselves comfortably in the shade with their embroidery.

An hour later found them re-assembled, all offering eagerly to assist in preparing the luncheon. Two of the boys went to a farmhouse at the top of the hill for water, while two others helped to mix the lemonade. The rest gathered sticks for a fire, over which the coffee was to be boiled, gypsy fashion. The girls spread the tablecloth upon a carpet of crisp, brown pine needles, and made tempting little mounds of the sandwiches and cakes.

"Now, Mrs. Wentworth, please don't work any more," begged Edith Wharton. "Do sit down and tell us what to do. You look so hot and tired."

"Mrs. Wentworth is to sit here. We've made her a throne," cried one of the boys, calling attention to a tiny bower being erected at the head of the tablecloth.

There was a merry argument, as Mrs. Wentworth laughingly declined the honor of the throne.

"Lucile," appealed some one. "Do coax your mother to sit here."

Lucile flushed and turned away without replying. Mrs. Wentworth saw her expression and understood the pain that use of the word mother had inflicted.

"How hard it is for the dear child to accept me," she thought sadly. "But I hope to win her yet."

"How silly and babyish she behaves, letting the boys and girls make such a fuss over her," thought Lucile crossly as the young people gathered about the cloth amid a great clatter of tongues.

Lucile's head ached. She felt oddly out of sorts and cross. Mrs. Wentworth noticed her dullness and watched her anxiously.

"I wonder if anything has happened to vex her," she thought. "It isn't natural for her to sit silent and abstracted like that when there is a good time going on."

Lucile's mood was noticed by everyone, but she excused her failure to join the conversation and general merriment on the plea of headache. The

noise and confusion, and the sight of food made her head throb painfully and it was a relief after luncheon to throw herself down on the grass with her head pillowed on Ellen's knees and to lie there without speaking. Ellen had a very soothing way of rubbing one's forehead, and the gentle steady pressure of her cool, strong hands sent Lucile off into a comfortable doze.

Ellen's own thoughts were happily busy with the good tidings she had sent home, and Mrs. Wentworth, tiptoeing up to the group, for Edith, Nan and Gladys were there too in a little bunch, with their books, hastened away again without disturbing them.

About four o'clock the girls drifted together again. The boys had gone off to a neighboring field for a game of base-ball, and Miss Andrews suggested reading aloud. Miss Andrews was very popular among the girls. She had most of them in her Sunday-school class and in any church work she undertook, found many ready helpers. In suggesting the reading aloud now, she had a motive. She drew a book from her bag and, before opening it, made a proposition.

"Girls," she said, "we need new seats badly in the Sunday-school room. We ought to have the kind with reversible backs. The racket is

something dreadful every Sunday when the benches are being moved into position. Don't you think we could make some money somehow, toward buying the new ones?"

The girls all drew nearer in interest, though no one had a suggestion to offer.

"I saw an entertainment once that was very attractive," continued Miss Andrews. "A poem was read aloud and illustrated by means of tableaux. It was really quite picturesque and charming.

"This book that I have brought with me, would illustrate in that way very prettily. It is called: 'Grandma's Attic Treasures.'"

"Oh, I know the book. I have a copy of it," exclaimed Nan eagerly, as the volume was passed from hand to hand.

"I thought that if we could make up pictures to go with this, and have it read, and then if some of you girls would play, and others recite, that we could make out a very pleasant evening."

"Lucile will recite, and she must read the poem, too," chorused the girls.

Ellen looked at her friend in surprise. This was a new accomplishment in her friend.

"Why did you never tell us at school," she exclaimed reproachfully.

"I wasn't going to blow my own horn, and the question of recitations never came up," she said, laughing awkwardly.

Lucile recited very well indeed, and was always interested in any entertainment that afforded scope for her elocutionary powers.

"But I can blow your horn," she went on mischievously to Ellen, then turning to Miss Andrews, said, "Ellen will play her violin for you. She plays beautifully."

Miss Andrews read the poem she had selected, frequently pausing to discuss appropriate verses for an illustrative tableau. The question of costuming was no less eagerly gone over and, to her surprise, Lucile found herself carried away by her interest, discussing animatedly with her step-mother the advisability of renting a spinning wheel, which was required in one or two pictures, from an antique shop in town, or of trying to restore an old one stowed away in the Wentworth garret.

Just then the boys appeared, hot and tired after their game and curious to know what was happening.

"Hello, what's going on?" called one.

"They're telling secrets," laughed another. "Don't you see how close their heads are together?"

"Oh, no, they're playing 'gossip,' " said a third.

The girls turned to them eagerly.

"We're getting up some tableaux to make money for buying new Sunday-school benches," they explained, "and we want you to help."

A general chorus of scornful shouts and jeers went up from the boys.

"Help! Stand up in silly tableaux? Not for anything!" they declared.

"But Dick Jackson, you will, won't you?" pleaded Lucile, making the attack direct upon one of the most obliging.

Her victim squirmed, reddened and looked uncomfortable.

"Oh, I guess not. It's such girl's play. The fellows 'd laugh," he said.

"What do you care if they do laugh—if they're rude enough," she retorted indignantly. "We'd counted on you and Sam Campbell and Rufus Howard."

"What's that?" asked Nan's brother sharply, hearing his own name. "You can just count me out of the game, you bet."

"We're only too glad to, you great rude, disobliging, slangy boy," exclaimed his sister hotly. "Rufus has better manners." For she

had overheard Rufus's genial, "Why, yes, I don't mind. What do you want me to be?"

Lucile held out the book to him eagerly.

"You're to be the lover. In the spinning-wheel picture. See, there it is."

"Lover! Ha, ha, ha! Old Rufe a lover! Ha, ha! Say, Rufe, how does it feel? You'll tell us about it afterward, won't you?"

Rufus grew red and embarrassed under the unmerciful shower of taunts, but he stuck to his word and took the teasing good-humoredly.

"Ho, ho, that's too good a joke to miss!" roared Dick Jackson, rolling over on the turf in delight, "I say, Rufus who's to be the lover-ess?"

"What a horrid, ill-mannered lot," exclaimed Lucile, turning away.

But Edith endeavored to plead their cause.

"It doesn't mean anything," she said, with blazing cheeks. "It's just you silly boys that make it seem foolish. And we girls have lots more respect for Rufus because he's sensible, and is interested in the art side of it. Isn't it so, girls?"

The others agreed with her so vehemently that the boys began to feel sheepish. After a little further argument, most of them ceased

their mockery and some volunteered their services. The subject proved so engrossing, when they became fully launched upon it, that the time slipped by unheeded.

"Come, come," exclaimed Mrs. Wentworth at last, "we must have our supper or else we won't be ready for the train."

Every one sprang up, surprised at the lateness of the hour, and while some helped to spread out the supper, others collected the scattered books and wraps. Lucile could not find her golf cape and remembering that she had used it as a screen earlier in the day, ran to get it.

There was a tiny rocky promontory where she and Ellen had been sitting, with a brook splashing along at the foot of it. The water of the stream was not clear, being stained and discolored from the foundries higher up the hill-side. But it filled in the picturesque scene, and its moisture had covered the surrounding stones with brilliant green mosses. The cape still hung from the boulder over which it had been tossed, to serve as a screen against the afternoon sun. Lucile clambered upon a moss-grown rock and reached for the cape. It caught and did not yield to her grasp. She pulled again, a quick, sharp jerk. The cloth gave way and at the same

moment Lucile's foot slipped on the deceptive moss. She tottered a moment striving to regain her balance, and then fell headlong with a splash into the pool of turbid water—anything but an inviting bath.

For a moment she remained perfectly still as she had fallen, too astonished to raise herself from her hands and knees, giving vent to a surprised little gasp. Then the ridiculousness of her position came over her, and she burst into a hearty laugh. She scrambled hastily to her feet and shook out her muddy skirts. Drying herself as best she might, she caught up her cape and hurried back to join the rest, none the worse for her mishap, save for the soiled hands and garments. The first person she encountered was her stepmother, and at Mrs. Wentworth's expression of surprise and concern, she steeled her heart against an expected reproof. But Mrs. Wentworth's thoughts were of the dangers of sitting for so long in damp clothes.

"Oh, Lucile, how did it happen?" she exclaimed.

Lucile glanced down at herself and remained silent.

"It is quite wet," continued her stepmother, feeling the cloth, "and there isn't time to go

up to the farmhouse to dry yourself. It's too bad."

"I'm sorry to have to go back to the city so dirty," replied Lucile grimly, "but I didn't do it on purpose, you may be sure."

She turned away quickly, without giving her stepmother time to speak, and scarce realizing the impertinence of her own last words.

Meeting Nan and Gladys just then, with two or three of the others, she entertained them with so comical an account of the accident that they went into peals of laughter, and all the rest gathered about to hear the joke. Mrs. Wentworth sighed as she followed the merry party down the hill.

"I am afraid I shall never win her over," she thought, discouraged for the first time. "This constant, wilful misunderstanding of everything I do or say, is not prompted by her loyalty to her mother's memory. It is just that she has taken a dislike to me." And she sighed again.

CHAPTER XXIV

A SUPPER PARTY

"GIRLS, what has come over Lucile?" cried Nan Campbell, bounding up on to the veranda in her usual impulsive fashion and flinging her straw hat carelessly on the floor. "She's so cross and snappy. Lucile never used to be snappy."

Several of the girls were assembled there, on Mrs. Wharton's shady back piazza. Edith was arranging flowers in the vases that stood on a small table and Milly was helping her. Gladys lay stretched in dignified repose in the hammock. The position was rather a difficult one to keep, a hammock not being in accord with dignity. But Gladys never lolled, not even in a hammock.

Edith looked up with a little sigh at Nan's words.

"I think it must be because she's not very well," she said. "She complains of headache so often and—and you know she isn't ever cross when she's herself."

Edith spoke warmly in Lucile's defence. She

half guessed at the real reason of this newly developed moodiness. But she wouldn't have hinted to the other girls that Lucile was unhappy about her stepmother. After all, it was only a suspicion on Edith's part, for Lucile had never spoken a word to her on the subject. It hurt a little to think that she had not. Indeed, Edith had a very decided feeling nowadays of being left out. She had always been first in Lucile's feelings; neither one had ever kept a secret from the other, and the two friends had been inseparable until Ellen's arrival. Lucile seemed quite absorbed by her new friend. Ellen was a very sweet girl, and Edith was fond of her, too, but she felt it a little hard that the friend of a lifetime should be put aside for one of a few months.

Lucile at present did find more satisfaction and comfort in Ellen's society than in that of her former friends. There was a feeling of constraint which, try as she would, she could not overcome in the presence of those comrades who had known her in the old days. She felt that they were comparing her former freedom with the present restraint and, perhaps, pitying her for it. That there was a certain amount of restraint, slight as Mrs. Wentworth's discipline was, could

not be denied. Lucile's pride would not allow her to discuss her new ties with the girls at home, not even with Edith. On the other hand Ellen was not familiar with her old habits of freedom, so that with her, Lucile felt no wounded pride when some old liberty was curtailed, or some prank forbidden.

Edith, therefore, was left out of her plans, even more than Lucile realized, and it hurt her not a little. But she was loyal to her friend withal, defended her to the other girls when Lucile's irritable manner or quick flashes of temper were criticized, and kept to herself the suspicion that Lucile was not happy at home under the new order of things.

"What has Lucile done, now?" asked Gladys, in reply to Nan's outburst. "Has she snubbed you?"

"No, not exactly that. But we were speaking about the entertainment to-night, and I said something about Ethel Stoddard. Lucile fired up at once and said that she was a very nice girl and that I oughtn't to criticize people wholesale."

"Ethel's trying to get into our set again through Lucile," remarked Gladys. "And of course Lucile doesn't know what sort of girl she really is, under all that agreeable manner. They came

here to live after Lucile went away to school, didn't they ? ”

“ Yes, and Ethel really does seem very nice when you first meet her,” said Milly. “ I liked her awfully until she behaved so badly at Nan's party.”

“ Oh, but wasn't I ashamed that I'd asked her ? ” exclaimed Nan in a tone of disgust. “ Why, girls, she sat out on the stairs with one of the boys all through supper. And mamma caught her trying to smoke a cigarette out on the veranda ! Ugh ! Mamma didn't get over it for weeks, and she'll just barely let me speak to Ethel now.”

“ Disgusting ! ” agreed Gladys. “ Really, Edie, you ought to give Lucile a hint.”

“ I did try the other day, when we were talking about to-night's supper-party,” began Edith, but she was interrupted by a chorus of astonished voices.

“ Has Ethel really had the coolness to ask her to the supper-party ? Well, upon my word ! ” ejaculated Nan. “ She isn't going, is she ? ”

“ Oh, surely not ! ” exclaimed the other two in a breath.

“ She wants to go,” admitted Edith. “ But I don't believe Mrs. Wentworth will let her.”

"Let her! Of course not! Mrs. Wentworth knows the people that Ethel goes with, and what sort of thing it will be. When is she to have it?"

"To-night, after the entertainment."

"Yes, in a private dining-room of the Alden House."

"Mercy! Why, they'll carry on awfully. Probably all the girls will smoke cigarettes and I shouldn't be surprised if they had wine. Surely you told Lucile."

"But she must know that none of us are going, and that ought to be enough to warn her," declared Gladys.

"She did think it queer that none of us were asked," replied Edith, "but Ethel has led her to believe that we are to be invited at the last minute. She pretended that it wasn't altogether certain that they were going to have the party, and that she didn't want to ask everybody until she was sure. Lucile is positive that we'll all be asked to-night at the entertainment. She thinks it's going to be awfully jolly. An omnibus is going to take them from the church to the ladies' entrance of the hotel. They are going directly into the private room, Lucile says, so that it will all be as private as a house."

"Pooh! Oh, well, Mrs. Wentworth will put her foot down on it, anyhow, so what's the use of worrying?"

"Yes, but will Lucile mind Mrs. Wentworth?" put in Nan. "She isn't used to minding people when she wants her own way."

"Well, she must have learned to do it a little bit at school," said Milly. "But here comes Ellen. Let's explain to her how it is."

"I wonder where Lucile is," exclaimed Edith a little anxiously, as she watched Ellen coming alone across the lawn.

"Lucile's lying down with a headache," said Ellen as she came up the steps. She says that we're to go ahead with the decorations, and to ask Miss Andrews to read. She wants to rest up for to-night. I met Miss Andrews as I came along and she asked us all to hurry right down."

The girls rose and gathered up their hats.

"Ellen," said Nan seriously, as the two walked down the street together. "I wish—ah—are you and Lucile going to Ethel Stoddard's supper-party to-night?"

Ellen flushed hotly at the question.

"No—I—I think not," she replied slowly. "Mrs. Wentworth doesn't wish Lucile to go."

That, in truth had been the reason of Lucile's

sudden unwillingness to join her comrades. That morning, just after breakfast, the girls and Mrs. Wentworth were sitting in the library over their letters which the postman had just left. Lucile glanced through a note addressed to her and called across to Ellen :

"It's all settled about to-night. I've a note from Ethel and she says that we're surely to go."

Mrs. Wentworth looked up quickly from the desk at which she had just sat down.

"Is it Ethel Stoddard of whom you are speaking, Lucile ?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Lucile readily, but wondering a little. "She has invited Ellen and me to a supper-party in a private room at the Alden House after the entertainment to-night. The Stoddards live at the Alden, you know, and her mother's going to chaperone us of course," she added, reading disapproval in her stepmother's eyes.

Mrs. Wentworth said nothing for a moment but sat pricking dots in the blotter with her pen point. Then she looked up a little doubtfully. She had never interfered in Lucile's personal pleasures before.

"Would—have you accepted the invitation ?" she asked.

"Yes, some time ago," answered Lucile. There was a suggestion of defiance in her voice.

Mrs. Wentworth's lips compressed slightly but she replied, in her usual even, cheerful tone :

"I hope it will not be too great a disappointment to refuse now, then, for I would rather you did not go."

For several moments there was silence in the room. Lucile sat staring at her stepmother, rendered dumb by her conflicting emotions.

"I most certainly shall not refuse the invitation," she said at last, trying to speak calmly but with a huskiness of voice that betrayed her rising excitement. "I have given Ethel my word and I shall not go back on it."

The pricks in the blotter grew larger and blacker.

"I prefer it, Lucile. I am very sorry, but I have reasons for asking you to stay at home."

Lucile's breath was coming hurriedly. Her cheeks were flushed but her lips were drawn and colorless.

"I can't help it, I intend to go," she said, her voice trembling in spite of her efforts.

"I have reasons," continued her stepmother quietly, as if she had not heard, "reasons which I think justify my asking you to remain away from

this party. In the first place, I don't like the idea of its being given in a hotel."

"But that's all right in this case, because they live in a hotel, and Mrs. Stoddard is to chaperone them—us," with a meaning emphasis on the last word which Mrs. Wentworth did not fail to notice.

"I am not quite satisfied with her chaperonage, Lucile," she said.

"Besides," finished Lucile determinedly, and ignoring the remark, "it's too late to refuse now. I've given my word."

"I know that it is late to send a refusal," acknowledged Mrs. Wentworth. "I would have spoken of the matter sooner, but I heard of it only yesterday."

Lucile's eyes flashed. So her stepmother had intended all along to interfere!

"It wouldn't have made the least difference. I'm going to the supper party to-night," she said with cool impertinence and turned to leave the room.

"Stop, Lucile. Wait a moment," called Mrs. Wentworth.

Ellen, who had been obliged to sit by, embarrassed, through the altercation, rose to slip out of the room with Lucile. But she, too, paused,

checked by the peremptoriness in Mrs. Wentworth's tone. Lucile stopped involuntarily.

"I think this matter would better be settled definitely before we separate for the day," said Mrs. Wentworth pleasantly. She had laid aside the spoilt pen and sat with her hands folded loosely on the desk before her. There was an air of calm strength about her that was baffling. "You surely understand, Lucile, that I am not interfering with your plans without good reason. But I really cannot allow you to go to this party to-night. It is unfortunate that I did not know of the plan sooner. Perhaps then we might have arranged some other little gathering of your friends to take its place. I'm sorry it's too late for that now, but we will do something pleasant to make up for it, later. Shall we not?"

She paused again, but reading opposition and defiance in the girl's set face, and tightened lips, the peremptoriness came back to her voice.

"But be that as it may," she continued, "you understand, do you not, that you are not to go to-night. Write your note to Ethel as soon as possible, please, and I will send James to the Alden House with it."

She returned to her writing then, quietly fitting

a new pen to her holder and not looking toward Lucile again.

The girl stood for a moment, struggling with her angry sobs for speech. At last she found voice enough to cry hotly :

"I'll write no note to Ethel and I'm going to the party!" and flung out of the door, past Ellen and up the stairs to her own room where she threw herself across the bed and gave way to a burst of angry tears.

"Oh, I can't bear it, I can't!" she sobbed. "To have her interfering so! It's just to show me she has a right over me! And to ask me to break my promise. As if it didn't matter! She has spoiled all the pleasure I might have had to-night, but I've given Ethel my word and I'll go to the party!"

Her sobbing grew less violent after awhile, but she still lay in a miserable, brooding heap, breaking forth in an occasional angry outburst. At the end of half an hour Ellen tip-toed timidly in, and ignoring her friend's swollen eyes and tear-stained face, began to rummage in a bureau drawer. She reminded Lucile presently that it was time to join the girls to decorate the Sunday-school room for the evening's entertainment.

"I'm not going," said Lucile, turning away

her face. "You go along, Ellen. Tell the girls I've got a headache and don't feel like it."

Ellen sighed. She would much rather have stayed at home with her friend, but she knew that she was not wanted. So, after volunteering to bathe Lucile's head or read her to sleep, both of which offers were refused, she betook herself reluctantly to Edith's, where, as has been seen, she was obliged to parry Nan's curious queries as to how Lucile had taken Mrs. Wentworth's refusal to allow her to attend the supper party.

"It will be horrid, really," Nan said emphatically. "And Lucile would never have dreamed of going if she knew what sort of girl Ethel is. Why, at a party at our house last spring she went out on the veranda with a boy and smoked a cigarette! Yes, she did," as Ellen made a little grimace of disgust. "My mother saw her. Of course we girls haven't had anything to do with her since, though she tried awfully to get into our set again.

"The girls she goes with are perfectly horrid. They go down town every afternoon and just walk the streets. They giggle and stare at strange boys, and even bow to them. None of us are asked to-night. Ethel knew she'd get snubbed for her pains. But I think she's trying

to get intimate with Lucile so as to be taken up again. Lucile ought to be very glad of any excuse to get out of going to-night, or of having any thing more to do with her."

Some of this news Ellen tried to impart to Lucile that afternoon, when they were lounging in the schoolroom together. But Lucile cut her short with :

"Please don't talk to me about that now, Ellen. It makes me too angry," and then she turned away, so that Ellen was obliged to hold her peace.

Lucile had declined to go down to luncheon on the plea that her head still ached. But by dinner time, which was an hour earlier than usual so that the girls might start promptly, she seemed quite herself. Her eyes were bright and her cheeks flushed. She talked so gaily to Ellen that that sympathetic damsel felt a great load taken off her heart. But Mrs. Wentworth, was anxious. To her Lucile's constant chatter and merriment seemed unnatural and forced. Lucile did not act quite like herself. Moreover, Mrs. Wentworth dreaded that the morning's battle would have to be refought. Lucile had not written the requested note of refusal. Katy had knocked at her door, at Mrs. Wentworth's bidding, during the course of the morning, and had asked for the note

that James was to take. Lucile had replied that there was no note to be sent and that Katy need not come back for one. And though Katy did go back, twice, she received the same answer.

Mr. Wentworth had telephoned that he was detained from coming home to dinner, but would join them at the church. Mrs. Wentworth trusted that she would be able to manage the little affair of the supper-party alone and not be obliged to call upon Mr. Wentworth's authority to assist her.

The three arrived early at the Sunday-school, and while the girls discussed one or two last doubtful points concerning the tableaux, Mrs. Wentworth moved about among Lucile's friends, speaking a few words to each in private. Ellen, having been taken into Mrs. Wentworth's confidence earlier in the day, knew the meaning of these little whispered asides. Lucile observed them also, but naturally put a different meaning to them.

"She's asking all the girls if they're going to the party, and thinks she'll be able to tell me that 'so and so's not going,' as another reason for giving it up," she thought sullenly, and her resolve to defy her stepmother strengthened.

The entertainment went off smoothly. Lucile,

standing at one side of the platform, read, in her pleasing, well-modulated voice, extracts from the poem, "Grandma's Attic Treasures," which was very artistically illustrated by means of tableaux. The boys and girls taking part had shown great care and attention in the matters of of posing and costumes. Then followed a series of solos and duets on the piano; Lucile and Nan recited, and Ellen played on her violin, a part of the evening's entertainment that was particularly enjoyed.

But on the whole, Lucile received the most praise. She recited excellently and her pathetic rendering of "Edward Gray," and the more sprightly "Spinning Wheel Song" were greeted enthusiastically. She came down from the platform after the final number, her brain reeling with excitement. The trouble of the morning was for the time almost forgotten. There was a general pushing back of chairs and Lucile's friends gathered about her with eager words of admiration and congratulation. Foremost among them was Ethel Stoddard who crowded close to Lucile and whispered:

"Everything's all arranged and the 'bus is waiting, so get your things and come."

Lucile hesitated for an instant.

"Who's going?" she asked.

"Oh, never mind. You'll see in the 'bus. Hurry up," urged Ethel, giving her a little push toward the cloak-room.

Lucile glanced across to where Mrs. Wentworth stood talking and laughing with several ladies. Her father and Ellen were already going toward the door. Just then Ellen looked back to see if the others were following and Lucile slipped into the cloak-room, closely followed by Ethel.

But, though Mrs. Wentworth had seemed so absorbed in her conversation, in reality she had observed all that passed, and seeing Ethel and Lucile disappear together, excused herself and followed them.

"Come, Lucile," she said pleasantly, pausing in the doorway of the cloak-room, "the carriage is waiting. Good evening," she added courteously to Ethel, who bowed stiffly.

"But Mrs. Wentworth," now interposed Ethel awkwardly, "I had invited Lucile and her friend home with me to a supper-party."

"That is very kind of you," replied Mrs. Wentworth graciously. "But I think Lucile had better not go. She has not been very well lately, and it would be wiser to have no more excitement to-night."

"I'm all right," declared Lucile sullenly, buttoning her jacket, "and I've promised Ethel to go."

"Yes, it would be awfully mean if you backed out of your promise now, Lucile."

"I'm not going to back out, Ethel. Come along."

Lucile moved forward but found the doorway blocked by Mrs. Wentworth's slender, erect figure.

"Let us pass, please," she said coldly.

Mrs. Wentworth held her ground.

"Really, Lucile, I cannot allow you to go," she repeated firmly. "Your father would not wish it, I am sure," she added, reading defeat in the girl's blazing eyes.

"Then my father can say so. It is he that I obey," and Lucile tried to pass.

"Of course it's your father who has the right to tell you what to do," agreed Ethel impertinently. "My, they'll all be cross at waiting. Where's Ellen?"

"Here I am," spoke Ellen's voice at that instant. "Who wants me? Is Lucile there?" she asked, peering into the dimly-lighted room. "Oh, Mrs. Wentworth, Mr. Wentworth asked me to come to find you and Lucile. The carriage is waiting."

"I'm not going home in the carriage," announced Lucile. "You and I are going to Ethel's supper-party, Ellen."

Mrs. Wentworth had stepped aside to allow Ellen to enter the cloak-room. At the same moment Ethel had slipped outside. The large room beyond was empty except for the janitor, moving back the chairs, and Miss Andrews and the Sunday-school treasurer, who were counting over the evening's proceeds up on the platform at the farther end of the room. Ellen, Lucile and Mrs. Wentworth stood together within the small cloak-room, and the latter had again placed herself within the narrow doorway.

There was silence for a moment after Lucile's last speech, broken by the sound of shouts and laughter from outside and frequent calls of "hurry up." Lucile grew more and more angry. She approached as closely as possible to the doorway. But Mrs. Wentworth did not move.

"I wish to pass," said Lucile furiously.

"Certainly, Lucile, if it is to go home with Ellen and me. Not otherwise."

Lucile caught her breath in an angry sob.

"I'm not going home with you or anybody else, just yet. I'm going to keep my engagement with Ethel Stoddard."



"I WISH TO PASS"

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Mrs. Wentworth made no reply and Ethel stamped her foot impatiently.

"Oh, Lucile," she cried, "do come! They're so tired of waiting. You're spoiling everything!"

Lucile moved forward one more step.

"Are you going to get out of my way?" she demanded threateningly.

"I am only waiting to take you home with me, Lucile," replied Mrs. Wentworth gently.

"Very well, you can wait, then," and with a sudden quick movement of her strong young arms, she pushed her stepmother aside and sprang through the doorway, to come face to face with her father.

He had entered in time to witness but not prevent, his daughter's action.

"Stop!" he cried in the cold, hard voice that Lucile had never dared to disobey. "What is all this about?"

Lucile recoiled before his look and tone. Hastily drawing him aside, Mrs. Wentworth explained the situation in a few words. Then he turned and caught Lucile's shoulder, none too gently.

"Your mother's right," he said harshly. "You're to have nothing to do with such affairs. Come home with us at once."

Lucile shook herself free and sprang back.

"She's not my mother, and you need not take hold of me as if I were a common thief!" she panted. "Ethel," she added, turning to the abashed girl, "I'll make it up to you for this." Her speech ended in a shrill excited scream, and with an angry sob she ran from the room.

CHAPTER XXV

TYPHOID FEVER

LUCILE sprang into the carriage, and, hurling herself back into the farthest corner, sat waiting for the others. Her temples throbbed with the angry blood that swelled them. She tingled and burned in every nerve yet at the same time felt oddly chilled.

The others came up presently, talking as though nothing had happened. No one spoke to Lucile, but Ellen gave her hand a sympathetic squeeze as she seated herself beside her. Lucile was too angry to return the pressure, and drew her hand away coldly. Mrs. Wentworth began to talk over the evening with Ellen. The cheerful conversation sent a sudden pang through Lucile's heart. She felt a strange sensation of loneliness, of being set apart. An impulse came over her to apologize to her stepmother, to give herself a right to share that genial, kindly praise which Mrs. Wentworth was bestowing upon those who had taken part in the evening's entertainment. But she was too angry yet to yield to

such an impulse. Her pride was sorely wounded. She had been spoken to roughly by her father before a comparative stranger. He had moreover, taken part against her. Most bitter of all, however, was the thought that she had had to yield her will to that of another ; above all, to this usurper, as she thought, of her home-happiness.

By degrees her fury abated but the throbbing sensation in her temples increased. She grew tired and listless. Mr. Wentworth had not spoken since entering the carriage but Lucile knew, from his tone in directing the coachman, that he was very angry. She anticipated a scene when they should arrive home, and she dreaded it. She knew that she would do her own cause no good. She could not plead for herself when her head ached so. Of course her father did not understand the facts of the case ; he did not know that she had given her word to Ethel, or he would have acted differently. She did not stop to consider that she had had no right to give her word without permission. But she could not go into particulars to-night ! She sighed wearily and leaned her head against the cushions. Her eyes burned as she closed them. No, it wasn't worth while to argue. She would listen

quietly to what her father had to say, and then go up-stairs to her own room. To bed ; that was what she wanted most, and if she did not speak, her father's lecture would be over and she free all the sooner.

Another sigh, that was almost a sob, escaped her. Mrs. Wentworth glanced across at her anxiously. The light of a passing street-lamp showed her Lucile's face, quite white and wan save for two bright spots of feverish color in the cheeks and her heart gave a quick little throb of fear. Lucile looked really ill.

When the carriage stopped at the house door, Lucile had to be aroused, and stumbled up the steps in a dazed way, clinging to Ellen's arm.

"Why, you dear girl," laughed Ellen merrily, throwing a fond arm around her friend's waist, and supporting her down the hall, "you must have gone sound asleep."

Mr. Wentworth was about to call his daughter back, as the two girls moved toward the stairs, but his wife laid a detaining hand on his arm.

"Wait until morning, dear, before saying anything," she whispered. "Don't you see that she is worn out? This is no time to bother her. Let her go to bed. We shall all be the better for sleeping over the matter."

Ellen ran back from the stairway to wish her host and hostess good night. Lucile seemed to have forgotten this piece of good manners. Or, if she did remember, that, and the quarrel preceding their drive home, remained equally vague and unimportant in her mind. Indeed, nothing mattered now, it seemed to her except to get to bed and to sleep—to sleep and so forget the strange, dull ache in her head and the fire in her veins.

Who had kindled that fire, she wondered? Had she done it, or was it her stepmother? Yes, it was she. She did most of the things that made Lucile uncomfortable and unhappy! But what did it matter now? There was her room at last, with its cool white bed! She began to undress hastily, giving such brief, odd answers to Ellen's remarks that that amiable girl became almost offended.

But Ellen's feeling changed quickly to anxiety when Lucile, after fifteen or twenty minutes restless tossing to and fro, fell asleep, and the moans of pain that she had controlled during wakefulness escaped her. Ellen sprang out of bed in alarm and ran across to her friend.

"Lucile! Lucile!" she called. "What ails you? Where are you suffering?"

"Oh, my head, my head," moaned Lucile without opening her eyes. Ellen laid her hand on her forehead. It was burning.

"Why, Lucile, I believe you have a fever! Have you any medicine?"

Lucile shook her head.

"But you must take something or you will be ill. Dear me, I wish I knew what to do!" cried poor Ellen.

Lucile seemed to have gone to sleep again and lay breathing heavily and occasionally moaning. Ellen sat beside her watching for some time, in growing anxiety. At last she resolved to call Mrs. Wentworth. Slipping into a wrapper, she ran down the hall and knocked softly at Mrs. Wentworth's door.

Mrs. Wentworth had been describing to her husband the train of events that had led to Lucile's outbreak.

"You see, I really was somewhat at fault," she said, "for I should have been at more pains beforehand to find out about the supper party and prevent Lucile's promising to attend it. If I had known in time that Lucile was to be asked, I might have prevented her accepting."

"How could you have found out about it, when the girl never tells you of her affairs," said

Mr. Wentworth sharply. His daughter's attitude toward her new mother was a constant sorrow and irritation to him.

"No," sighed Mrs. Wentworth, "I haven't succeeded very well yet in gaining Lucile's confidence. But I've by no means given up hope," she added brightly.

"And to-night," she continued after a moment's pause, "I can perfectly understand Lucile's point of view. She feels that she has been made to break a promise. Also, I dare say, she was disappointed, for the supper-party as Ethel had planned it, sounded attractive and Lucile could not be expected to know the sort of companions Ethel would choose. But I have arranged a little surprise for Lucile, to make up to her for her disappointment, of which I am sure you will approve. I have invited about twenty of her boy and girl friends to come here to-morrow night to play games. A sort of surprise party, you know, And I thought——"

At that moment Ellen's knock sounded at the door.

"I am awfully sorry to disturb you, Mrs. Wentworth," she said as the door was hastily opened, "but I feel so anxious about Lucile. She groaned so in her sleep just now, and com-

plains of her head. She's so hot I'm afraid she has a fever."

Mrs. Wentworth hurried to Lucile's room. The girl was sleeping more quietly. Mrs. Wentworth prepared a mixture for Ellen to give her should she waken, and left with injunctions to be called again if Lucile seemed to grow worse. She feared to remain lest Lucile should waken and be irritated at finding her there.

Early next morning she knocked at the door for news. Ellen tip-toed out to say that Lucile had slept heavily all night and was not yet awake. Mrs. Wentworth, much relieved by this news, hurried away to prepare a cup of coffee for her husband, who was obliged to go out of town on business by an early train.

But when Ellen came down, dressed for their own later breakfast, her report was not encouraging. Lucile had wakened and had talked naturally and even brightly at first, but had suddenly dropped asleep again in the middle of a sentence. Mrs. Wentworth went up at once, and Lucile's appearance so alarmed her that she sent James off post-haste for the doctor. The girl's lips were parched and dry, her skin burning and she lay in a sort of heavy stupor, moving only at intervals to beg for water.

The doctor was closeted with the patient for some time. When he came out, Mrs. Wentworth read in his face the confirmation of her worst fears.

"Typhoid fever," he said briefly. "Rather a bad case. Been in the system some time, I should judge. Better have a trained nurse at once."

Mrs. Wentworth's heart sank, and Ellen, who was present, gave a little gasp of dismay.

"Oh, doctor," she cried, "is she so bad as that?"

A trained nurse meant to Ellen's inexperience the most alarming sort of illness, with small hope of recovery. A great lump rose in her throat. The good old doctor re-assured her.

"It isn't so bad as all that long face, little one," he said kindly. "Lucile's a sturdy youngster and I'll back her to weather almost any storm. Mrs. Wentworth, may I have a few words with you?"

At this hint, Ellen sprang up quickly to leave the room. At the door it occurred to her that there was something she could do to help and she turned to ask eagerly :

"Mrs. Wentworth, would you not like me to write to the boys and girls not to come to-night?"

"To-night? The boys and girls!—Oh, I had forgotten," exclaimed Mrs. Wentworth, collecting herself. "Thank you, dear, for your thoughtfulness. Yes, write the notes and James will go around with them on horseback. You will find the list on the top of my writing-desk," she added.

Ellen ran off, glad to have something to do. She took her work into the schoolroom, and was busy for a couple of hours. She had finished the notes and was writing to her mother, when Mrs. Wentworth entered the room.

"Lucile is sleeping more restfully now," she said, "and the doctor has telephoned that the nurse will be here in half an hour."

"Does the doctor think Lucile very, very ill?" asked Ellen hesitatingly.

"Not dangerously—at least, not yet," replied Mrs. Wentworth with a little break in her usually calm voice. "But it will be a long, long pull. And Ellen dear," she added after a pause, "I fear I shall have to send you home."

"Yes, Mrs. Wentworth," said Ellen bravely, though with disappointment in her tone. "But I was hoping that I could be of some help, if I stayed. I am very fond of Lucile and I'd do anything for her!" She looked up appealingly.

"It isn't that, dear," replied Mrs. Wentworth gently. "But I am just a little afraid of contagion. I couldn't let you get ill, you know."

"Yes, I understand," responded Ellen slowly. "Of course I must go."

She turned back to the desk and then looked up.

"I hope it won't seem as if I were running away from danger. I would gladly stay for Lucile's sake, but I mustn't do anything to worry you, dear Mrs. Wentworth."

Mrs. Wentworth smiled and kissed Ellen affectionately.

"Thank you, dear," she said gratefully. "I do feel worried about Lucile," she admitted, "but everything will turn out all right, if we are brave and patient. And perhaps," she added with a little choke, "perhaps Lucile and I will learn to know each other better. Perhaps this may bring us closer together."

Ellen hesitated a moment and then said impulsively:

"Mrs. Wentworth, I'm sure Lucile wants to love you. But she—she——" Ellen hesitated, blushing. She could not say to this kind, gentle woman, "she has made up her mind to dislike you."

But Mrs. Wentworth understood.

"She cannot help feeling that I am an intruder," she finished quietly. "I know perfectly how Lucile feels, and I think she has some right on her side, Ellen. I realize that her father should have taken his daughter more into his confidence about me before our marriage, and made us acquainted. I love Lucile dearly and I am sure that I can make her see it, if she only gives me the chance. She is a very charming girl, and is fast learning to curb her one great fault, her temper. A great deal has been explained in regard to her recent behavior, by the development of her illness," she added apologetically, and Ellen knew that she was thinking of the scene in the cloak-room.

"I can sympathize with Lucile on the question of her temper," went on Mrs. Wentworth, "for I was just that sort of girl myself."

"You mean that you had a quick temper?" cried Ellen in amazement. "Why, Mrs. Wentworth, I've never seen you even ruffled. It seems impossible!"

Mrs. Wentworth smiled at this very sincere compliment.

"It was a long struggle and a hard one, to subdue it," she said. "And not only was I hasty and bad-tempered, but I was over-sensitive

as well, always fancying slights where none were intended. As the boys say, I was always going about with a chip on my shoulder. It was a most unhappy frame of mind, I assure you. Then, one day a very wise, kind lady showed me that I myself was the cause of my own unhappiness, and taught me how to overcome the trouble.

"But dear me," she exclaimed, interrupting herself, "here I am chattering away when I should be back with Lucile. I will send you up a timetable, dear, and Katy will carry your things into the guest-room and help you pack them. You don't think me dreadfully inhospitable?"

"Oh, no, dear Mrs. Wentworth. Of course not. But," Ellen paused and smiled shyly. "I was so interested to learn how you overcame your temper."

Mrs. Wentworth laughed.

"That will have to keep for another story," she said brightly. "After Lucile is well again you must come back to finish your visit," and kissing Ellen again, she left the room.

CHAPTER XXVI

AN ACCIDENT

LUCILE was very ill—for a time, dangerously so. But her perfectly healthy nature and iron constitution won the battle. Not without the assistance of careful, patient nursing, however. The trained attendant was strong, enduring and tireless. But even her drilled fortitude could not have born the long struggle alone,—the constant watchfulness, the momentary ministering to the patient's wants, the long night vigils. Lucile was delirious for days and could not be left alone a moment. Mrs. Wentworth went into the sick-room and gave herself up unconditionally to the duties of assistant nurse. Through the long hours of the summer nights she sat by Lucile's bed, fanning the restless, tossing sleeper and listening sadly to the disjointed phrases that dropped at intervals from the parched lips. She learned in these hours of watching of the girl's long struggles to overcome her temper, of her efforts to make of herself such a character as her mother would have wished. There were phrases which fell repeatedly from the girl's lips, that she could not under-

stand ; concerning poor people turned out to starve, of jewels bought with money cruelly come by ; of somebody's harshness and hardness of heart. Once the girl cried out, " Miss Granville ! Oh, Miss Jones must never know ! " Mrs. Wentworth thought that she was calling her and bent over the bed with a gentle word. Lucile looked at her vacantly for a moment and then said solemnly, " No, no one shall ever know the sort of woman she really is."

Mrs. Wentworth did not speculate on these sick fancies. The ravings passed and she perceived with joy, as the disease wore on, that her own labors and self-sacrifice had not been offered in vain. Lucile seemed quieter when her stepmother bathed her forehead, more satisfied when it was her stepmother's voice that answered the fretful, childish queries.

When the fever was finally broken, there came a period of quiet—a sort of peace after the battle, before she felt the impatience of returning strength, in which Lucile lay motionless in her white bed, her eyes gazing dreamily out through the windows to rest upon the tossing branches of the trees, green interlaced against the burnished blue of the late August sky. There was very little to be done in the sick-room now. Mrs.

Wentworth came and went, bringing in a vase of fresh flowers or shifting a curtain to suit the light to the sick girl's weakened eyes. She spoke rarely, save to ask an occasional necessary question or to utter the customary good night and good morning.

Lucile watched her stepmother, with an odd wistfulness, as the days passed and she grew stronger and more observant. She thought she looked tired, and she missed the girlish lightness of movement that had been characteristic of Mrs. Wentworth. Once, when she was lying with closed eyes and Mrs. Wentworth thought she slept, Lucile heard a long-drawn, tremulous sigh come from the window by which her stepmother was sitting, and peeping through half-closed lids, she saw a tear glisten on the open pages of a book. Lucile made no sign that she had seen or heard, but later, when Mrs. Wentworth came to give her her medicine the girl reached out both hands, saying impulsively :

"You have tired yourself all out nursing me. I am very grateful."

Mrs. Wentworth was surprised and pleased. But she only answered quietly :

"I was only too glad to help, dear."

It was the only outward reconciliation that

took place between Lucile and her stepmother, but things went much more smoothly after that. Lucile was soon able to sit up, and from an easy chair by the window to the carriage was not a slow transition. September had set in and the days were cooler. As she grew stronger Lucile's girl friends shared in turn her drives, leaving Mrs. Wentworth free to take the daily rest that she at last acknowledged was necessary. The nurse had gone, but Mrs. Wentworth slept in Lucile's room for fear that something should go wrong in the night, as Lucile was subject to nervous frights or fits of depression.

Lucile was surprised to find how happy she was. She found herself chatting with her stepmother as intimately and enjoyably as with any of the girls. On Mrs. Wentworth's part there was no constraint of any sort, nor any consciousness of past misunderstanding. But in Lucile's heart rested the memory of that evening in the Sunday-school room, of her violent outburst, ending in that fearful insult, that cruel push she had given her stepmother ! How could she have so far forgotten herself ! She felt that an apology at the very least was due her stepmother, and indeed, longed to make reparation for an act of which she was deeply ashamed. Time and again

she opened her mouth to speak upon the subject, but the words would not come. It was so hard to know how to begin, or what to say to pave the way for her apology. The right words never seemed to suggest themselves and she put it off from day to day, and no favorable time presented itself.

Mrs. Wentworth did not seem to expect anything of the sort, and appeared perfectly satisfied with the present state of things. She was always the same; calm, serene and cheerful, and not the most vivid imaginings of Lucile's guilty conscience could construe any word or action into a recollection of that night, the culmination of all Lucile's wilfulness, and which had grown by this time to the proportions of a nightmare in Lucile's mind.

Then Miss Jones's deferred visit took place, and Lucile spent a happy fortnight with her. Miss Jones was persuaded to speak of herself and her own affairs for once, and acknowledge that she had finished the book the existence of which she had confessed to Lucile at school. Mrs. Wentworth was interested, and high in her praise of the work, which she was allowed to read, which pleased the English teacher beyond words.

It was decided that Lucile would not return to

school until the spring term, but Miss Jones marked out a course of reading for her, that she might not fall too far behind in her studies. Lucile, feeling quite strong and well, settled down to this work as soon as Miss Jones, laden with numberless messages to Miss Hobart and the girls, had left her. Her reading occasionally took her to her father for advice, and unconsciously the two fell into a more sympathetic tone of intercourse than had ever before been the case between them. Mr. Wentworth thought that her illness had improved his daughter, but Lucile realized that the new state of things was due to her stepmother's influence.

The autumn passed rapidly. Lucile's friends were occupied with their own school work and she was thrown more and more on Mrs. Wentworth for companionship. Seeing her thus intimately, Lucile learned to love and esteem the woman from whom she had never received aught but kindness but whom she had so misjudged. Her regard grew steadily, and though she never spoke to her stepmother of this complete change of feeling, Mrs. Wentworth understood and knew that she had won the hard-fought battle at last.

One afternoon, late in October, Lucile was alone in the schoolroom. Her stepmother had gone driving but Lucile was prevented from accompanying her because of a slight cold. She sat in front of the old piano that had been her mother's. Her fingers rested idly on the keys, and her thoughts were far away, busy with the events of the past year.

Suddenly Katy came running into the room. She was sobbing and held her apron before her eyes with two trembling hands.

"Run, run, darlint, if you'd be hearin' her last words! They're bringin' her up the stairs now: Oh, darlint, it's awful!"

For one stunned instant after this incoherent outburst, Lucile sat motionless. Something terrible had happened. But what? She felt a cold sinking of the heart, but her lips refused to form the words that must put into speech the horrible fears that the maid's words had roused. But she found voice enough to gasp as she rose trembling: "Katy, Katy, tell me what it is! What are you talking about?"

"Oh, darlint, it's kilt she is, the poor, poor lady. The horses, bad 'cess to 'em, run off wid her 'n' it's kilt entoirely she is. Oh the pity, the pity!"

Killed! She—her stepmother killed! Could

this be true? Could it be true! Lucile stood staring at the bearer of the tidings in dumb horror. Could it be true! Then:

"No, no, Katy, it's not true!" She fairly shrieked the words.

Just then sounds came to them from the hall. Slow moving, shuffling sounds as of several people carrying a heavy weight. Lucile sprang across the room and, before the maid could stop her, had flung the door wide open. Four strange men were carrying a stretcher—a stretcher with a covered form lying on it, into her stepmother's room. Her father was walking beside the stretcher. He was busy directing the men, watching that they moved gently, and did not notice his daughter. Lucile stood motionless in the doorway.

"Father!" she gasped hoarsely.

Her father looked up and shook his head.

"Oh, father," she cried, "just tell me, is it—is it——"

He understood.

"I don't know yet, dear child," he whispered, "I'll come to you after the doctor has been here. James will tell you how it happened," he added kindly, seeing the misery in her face. Then he followed the men into the room and closed the door.

Lucile stood watching the closed door with hot,

dry eyes. Presently Katy, regaining a little of her presence of mind, drew her back into the schoolroom. Lucile yielded readily and went over and sat down by the table. She was still too dazed to cry—to know really that she had reason to cry. Katy's emotional nature was alarmed at her young mistress' passiveness.

"Miss Lucile," she said timidly, touching her on the arm, "it seems as how I was a bit hasty like in what I said, miss, about her bein' kilt." Lucile shivered at the word. "Ye see, the master has hopes. But, miss, if you could just cry a bit like."

"Has hopes, Katy?" cried Lucile, a great lump rising in her throat. "Has hopes? Oh, Katy! Katy!"

At that moment Katy was summoned to the sick-room, and Lucile sat alone, trying to swallow the big lump in her throat and repeating the words, "has hopes, has hopes." Hope? Of course there was hope! Who dared to hint that there wasn't? Her stepmother couldn't die. Oh, she couldn't! Lucile caught her breath and pressed her hands together hard. If only she could "cry a bit-like!"

The early autumn twilight fell presently and still Lucile sat alone. She heard occasional soft

footsteps in the hall, whispered words and the gentle closing of a door, alternated by a silence which the ticking of the schoolroom clock seemed to break into a thousand echoes. But no one came to Lucile. She sat motionless, listening with tense ears to any sound, leaning back listlessly when all was still. She longed to know more about the accident, where it had occurred, and how serious it had been. She had risen once or twice to ring for James, but a sudden revulsion of feeling came over her, a sickening dread to hear the runaway spoken of, and she had sat down again.

She remembered the day, over a year ago, when Rubble had run away with her and Edith, and how narrow their escape had been. She had treated the matter lightly at the time, and had thought her father far too severe. But now she understood better. His feeling had not been a desire to punish her for disobedience, but fear for the risk she had run. As she went over the event in her memory, she seemed to see her father's action in a new light.

"Why, I don't believe he was angry at all!" she ejaculated in astonishment at this late discovery. "He started to praise me, I remember, and then I provoked him by being so disagree-



"OH, KATY, IS THERE ANY NEWS?"

44

able. Oh, dear, how many, many mistakes I have made all my life. I wonder if I can ever make up for any of them. I shall try. And I shall start off by telling father that I'm sorry about Rubble, the very first chance I get. Then I will apologize——" she stopped, overwhelmed by a sudden, stinging pain. She had never spoken to her stepmother about that night in the Sunday-school room—had never apologized for that dreadful push. And now perhaps it might be too late. Oh, if it were!

At that moment the door opened and Lucile sprang up with a nervous cry. It was Katy, bringing in a tray set with tea-things.

"Ach, be all the powers, the little lady's settin' in the dark!" exclaimed the kind-hearted maid in dismay.

She set down her tray and quickly lighted the gas.

"Oh, Katy," cried Lucile, jumping up and seizing her wrist. "How is she? Is there any news? Has the doctor gone?"

"There's two or three doctors there now, miss. It's holding a consultation they is. The master bid me tell you he'd come to ye as soon as they've left. Now, do try to eat a bite, miss, for it's better things is."

The maid arranged the tempting little tray on a table at Lucile's side, poured a cup of fragrant hot cocoa, and then, for the night had come on chill and rainy, proceeded to build a fire in the grate.

But Lucile could not eat. A consultation! That sounded very alarming indeed, and she went back to her chair to await her father anxiously. He came at last and she saw at once by his face that if there were any hope at all, it was a very faint one.

"Oh, father," she cried, and then could say no more.

There was a coffee pot on the tray. Mr. Wentworth went over to the table without speaking, poured himself out a cup of the steaming beverage, drank it black and then sat down wearily, opposite his daughter. It seemed to her that he had grown thinner and older these last three hours.

"Can you tell me what the doctors said?" she asked presently, in a low, faltering voice.

Mr. Wentworth looked up from the reverie out of which her words had startled him.

"We can't know until morning, dear," he said gently. "Her head was struck and it was hours before we could bring her back to consciousness. Now she must have some rest before the doctors

n can be sure that no injury has happened to the
t brain.

n "I am going to watch here," he went on after a
e pause. "She is sleeping now, and a nurse is with
! her. Doctor Brunswick will return in an hour
, and sleep in the house."

. "And is there nothing that I can do, father?"
asked Lucile piteously.

r "Nothing, child," he answered gently, touched
; by her manner. "No one can do anything now
, but wait. I think you had better go to bed.
, I'll call you if—if any change comes." His voice
broke over the words.

. "Oh, father, I couldn't go to bed! Don't send
me. Let me wait here with you," begged
Lucile.

"But you are not strong yet, Lucile. Remember
how short a time it is since your illness. And,"
glancing sharply at the tray, "I don't believe you
have had any supper."

"I couldn't eat," she protested faintly.

But Mr. Wentworth rang for hot toast and
cocoa and insisted upon a good meal. He moved
about the room while waiting for the toast, glad
to be diverted for the moment from his own sad
thoughts. He made Lucile eat some of the toast
and then sent her to put on a loose wrapper, giv-

ing her permission to lie on the schoolroom sofa for the first part of the night at least.

Doctor Brunswick returned, was closeted with the patient a short time, and then was installed in Lucile's room, that being the nearest to the sick-room. for the night.

CHAPTER XXVII

CONCLUSION

THUS the long vigil began. The schoolroom fire burned steadily and cheerfully. Mr. Wentworth, seating himself by the table, opened a bundle of papers and commenced looking over them, sorting them with his accustomed tidiness into little packets and occasionally jotting down a memorandum. Lucile lay watching him. She remembered how often she had noticed those same India-rubber-packeted bunches on her father's desk and resented their orderliness. She wished now that she too had some employment that would occupy her hands and thoughts for the moment, to keep her from listening in that straining, useless way, for any chance sound across the hall. She tiptoed out of the room presently for some sewing. She brought her basket back and moved a chair over near the light. But the work soon fell from her hands. It happened to be a towel that her stepmother was teaching her to hem-stitch, and the fast gathering tears hid the stitches as she realized that per-

haps the fingers that had taught her would never hold a needle again.

It is a fearful thing to wait for—the turning of the scale of a human life! And Lucile was very young to have to endure the ordeal. She never forgot that night. It was a comfort to be near her father, and she thought that he felt the same comfort in her presence, for he looked up from his work occasionally and smiled. Once the tears rushed to his eyes and he reached out and patted her hand gently.

“Father,” said Lucile in a voice choked with emotion, encouraged by this demonstration, “Father, I—there was something I had always wanted to—say to—to her, ever since I was ill, and I——”

“Yes?” asked her father kindly, as she paused.

“It was about that night in the Sunday-school room,” continued Lucile bravely. “I—I pushed her, father, and I have always wanted to say I was sorry and never have.” Lucile stopped, ashamed.

The confession had weighed heavily upon her soul, but now that it was made, it seemed such a trivial thing—so very trivial to speak of at such a time!

But Mr. Wentworth did not seem to think so. He took the girl's hand tenderly within his own and drew her down beside him.

"My daughter. You shall tell her, the very first thing when she wakes. It will please her to know that you are sorry," he whispered.

His own voice broke and he said no more. But he pressed Lucile down upon a stool close beside him, and rested one hand on her hair while he returned to his work. Lucile leaned her head against his knee and sat there contentedly. After a while she looked up and saw that her father had put away his papers and was watching the fire, lost in thought. He met her eyes and smiled.

"My daughter," he said presently, with a new tenderness in his voice that Lucile had never heard before, "I'm afraid we haven't gotten along together very well, have we?"

"Ah, father," she cried repentantly, "I have been rude to you so often."

"Not rude, dear, but thoughtless," he corrected gently. "And the sting of your words has gone deep. Do you remember that once you said to me, 'if only you had loved me!'"

"Oh, father," she sobbed, "don't talk of that now. Please don't!"

He smoothed her hair gently and continued:

"I have made a great many mistakes, daughter. I have been careless and severe and thoughtless with you. But it was not because I did not love you. It was partly because I let myself become absorbed by business cares, and partly because I was anxious to bring you up right and did not know how. And so I indulged you and scolded you and you thought I didn't care."

"Father!" she whispered, seizing the large, caressing hand in both her own.

"We both needed your mother, child," Mr. Wentworth went on after a pause. "And then I met a woman who reminded me of your mother, so tender and womanly, and I loved her. I had not forgotten your mother, Lucile, and I was not doing her memory an injustice. But I had a notion that you might look at it in that light. So I did not explain my marriage, or talk it over with you as I should have done. I said to myself, 'she is only a child and would not understand if I tried to explain. I will tell her that it is for her good and she will accept my judgment. She will obey for the present and later, when she is older, she will understand.'"

"And so I was abrupt in breaking the news to you, and, I am afraid, harsh in my after

treatment. My little girl, can you forgive me now, and learn to love her who has come, not to take your mother's place, but to make up to you for that loss? Can you, my daughter? For we both want very much to be loved."

"Oh, father, I know. I—I understand now. I—oh, forgive me. I am so sorry!"

Lucile buried her face in her hands and wept unrestrainedly, gasping out the few broken phrases that had in them more eloquence to her father's ears than volumes.

He let her have her cry out undisturbed and then they had a long, long whispered talk—a talk that made Lucile feel awed and solemn for years afterward whenever she thought of it. Father and daughter came very close together; a bond of sympathy was established between them which was never once broken during their lives—a bond of mutual understanding and sympathy.

In the gray light of the late autumn dawn the nurse appeared in the doorway and beckoned, them. Her calm, serene face told of hope and to Lucile she looked like a white-clad angel from Heaven.

Yes, Mrs. Wentworth would live, the doctor said, though it meant a long, long period of waiting and suffering. The concussion of the

fall had produced no serious result. It was the severe shock to the nervous system which made the doctor fearful.

Mrs. Wentworth was a model patient and made every effort to bring about her own recovery, the best help in the world in a nervous malady. But she was very weak and her strength was slow in returning. Autumn had slipped into winter and it was Thanksgiving time before she could leave her bed. By Christmas she could walk across her bedroom, and on the thirty-first, the anniversary of her wedding, she was carried across to the schoolroom sofa. Lucile had refused to join a coasting party in order to spend the day with her stepmother, but she did not know that Mrs. Wentworth knew of the invitation.

She was very much surprised therefore, when Mrs. Wentworth suddenly put out her hand and said:

"I want to thank you for giving up your pleasure in order to keep me company to-day, Lucile."

Lucile blushed and looked embarrassed.

"I'd much rather be here," she replied. "It's so warm and cosy and home-like."

She glanced about her with a contented little sigh. They were in the schoolroom. A big fire

blazed on the hearth and the setting sun sent in a radiant pink glow through the windows. The table near by was covered with books and magazines, and Christmas gifts were scattered about. Lucile drew a low stool to her mother's couch and sat down.

"I shall almost hate to go back to school," she said after a moment, breaking a thoughtful silence that had fallen upon them both.

They fell to talking of Lucile's plans, of her school, and so back to her first days at Miss Hobart's and those Christmas holidays a year ago. Then Lucile, with hanging head and blushing cheeks, told her real reason for leaving the house on the night of her father's wedding; of her foolish idea to run away from home, to go out into the world and make her way among strangers. She did not spare herself in the telling, but confessed every fancied wrong, every angry, excited thought that had led up to her tragic resolve. Momentarily she expected to hear Mrs. Wentworth's amused laughter ring forth, but when she looked up at the end she saw, to her great astonishment and dismay, that she was crying.

"Why, what in the world!" she exclaimed amazed. "Oh, dear, now I've gone and upset you and made you ill again," she cried in distress.

"I am all right now," Mrs. Wentworth hastened to re-assure her. "But to think that you should have suffered so ! It is too bad !"

"But don't you see it was all my own foolish fault?" cried Lucile eagerly. "I should not have said anything."

"Yes, you should. I am glad you told me, and I want to say something in return. No, let me speak. It will do me good." Then she hesitated a moment as if in doubt how to begin :

"I had a very lonely life as a girl," she continued after a pause. "I was an orphan and brought up among relatives. Most of each year was spent at boarding-schools. For my vacations I was handed on from house to house, each uncle or aunt taking me in turn.

"When your father asked me to marry him, you can guess what it meant to me, aside from the joy of spending my life with the man I love," she added parenthetically, "it meant love, consideration, home—everything that my life had so far denied me. Then your father told me of you and my heart went out to you at once ; a motherless girl, missing the same mother's loving care that I had missed. I made many plans for our life together, of the care I should lavish upon you, how happy I would make you.

"And in the happiness of my hopes of a home and daughter, I was selfish. I did not consider your point of view. When I did, I realized what I must seem to you—an intruder, a usurper. That in gaining a home for myself I was stepping into your place.

"But you see I did it all unthinking, Lucile. I had intended to make your home more home-like to you, not spoil it; to be a mother to you instead of interfering with your rights.

"I am afraid I have made a great failure," she finished sadly, "but—" pressing the girl's hand as Lucile started to speak, "now that we understand everything better, and have explained our points of view, don't you think that we can come to some sort of compromise?"

But Lucile turned her head away quickly. Did they understand everything? How could Mrs. Wentworth account for that reputation in the tenement district that pronounced her hard, cruel, heartless? During these last weeks of anxiety that painful incident upon which she had brooded so constantly, had slipped from Lucile's mind. As it returned to her now stronger and more overpowering by reason of her momentary forgetfulness it had the effect that a shower of ice-water would have upon one sitting peacefully in a warm

room. She caught her breath with a sharp sound between her set teeth, and shivered. Her face changed from deep crimson to an extreme pallor that startled her stepmother.

"Lucile, what is it?" she exclaimed, leaning forward to look into the girl's averted face. "Are you in pain? Tell me."

"No, no—I—I am all right. I shall be all right in a moment," murmured Lucile confusedly, and rising, she crossed hastily to the window to control her emotion.

As she stood, half concealed by the wide folds of the cretonne hangings, the door opened and her father entered.

"Claire," he said eagerly, advancing to his wife's couch, "I have an anniversary present for you."

"Another, Geoffrey?" she exclaimed gaily, to hide the anxiety she felt at Lucile's sudden action. "How you are spoiling me!"

"Ah, but this is different," replied Mr. Wentworth, seating himself and putting his hand into an inner pocket of his coat. "It is something for which you have been waiting for months."

"Oh, Geoffrey," cried Mrs. Wentworth eagerly, raising herself on the couch, "is it——"

"Yes" he interrupted, "it is the last of your

aunt's property on Small Street. My broker succeeded in buying it in only yesterday. He had the deeds ready for me this afternoon."

As Mr. Wentworth spoke he drew a long, legal-looking envelope from his pocket and handed it to his wife.

"Oh, Geoffrey!" she said softly, sinking back among the cushions with a happy sigh. "I am so grateful. Those poor people. But I'm afraid it was a very expensive present," she added, looking up.

"Yes," he admitted, half laughing. "She did not want to sell unless she could make enormously by the transaction. As her former tenants say of her, 'Miss Granville's a hard un, she is.'"

"Poor aunt!" sighed Mrs. Wentworth regretfully. "But, Geoffrey, how we shall enjoy making it up to those suffering people! We shall make the Granville tenements the ideal portion of the district, shall we not?" and she subsided into a happy reverie, clasping the envelope eagerly in her white, trembling hands.

Lucile, standing in the shadow of the curtains, had not heeded her father's entrance. His first words fell unobserved upon her ears. She was struggling with herself, struggling to overstep the last barrier that stood between her and her

love for her stepmother. But it was the greatest barrier of all, and the most difficult to overcome. For she felt that she must not only forgive Mrs. Wentworth for that scene which had branded itself so burningly upon her mind, but she must forgive her unquestioningly. Not alone must she pardon that which she did not understand, but she must never seek to understand. For to ask an explanation of Mrs. Wentworth's actions, implied a distrust of her motives, and to Lucile not to trust meant not to love.

Her attention was caught by a word. What was her father saying about Small Street? That was the scene of the sad incident to which she was even then striving to reconcile herself. The word brought back the picture vividly, thrillingly, and she frowned in a sudden tempestuous flash of indignation against the woman who was capable of treating her fellow mortals so cruelly. All her old aversion for Mrs. Wentworth swept back upon her. But at the same instant her attention was riveted by her father's words. She listened, spell-bound, to the conversation which followed. Her expression changed from surprise to amazement, from amazement to joy and delight. Then a swift flood of mortification spread its crimson wave over her face and

neck and brow. She had jumped to a false conclusion! She had seen and heard and had judged on her own responsibility without even taking the trouble to assure herself that she was right.

"How like me!" she groaned miserably.
"How like me!"

But at least there was time for reparation. She turned without hesitation and faced the couple sitting close together in the soft shadows of the firelight.

"Why, Lucile," exclaimed her father, starting up in surprise, "I did not know you were there."

"Father," she said breathlessly, "whose property was that you have just bought in Small Street?"

"Why, Miss Granville's, your mother's aunt," replied Mr. Wentworth, wondering at his daughter's vehemence.

Lucile stood looking at them for a moment in a dazed silence. Then, rushing across the room she flung herself upon her knees beside the couch and burst out crying.

"Oh, forgive me, forgive me," she sobbed.
"I have wronged you so cruelly!"

"Why, Lucile, what do you mean? What

have you done?" exclaimed Mrs. Wentworth in great agitation.

"Hush, Lucile," interposed her father sternly, "you are alarming your mother. Explain your meaning at once."

Lucile checked her sobs and looked up bravely.

"I—it was not because I did not want you for my mother, or was jealous of you, that I opposed you all this time," she said. "At least it was not altogether my reason," she added honestly. "But I thought you were cruel and selfish and hard—and I disliked you."

"But, Lucile, how—for what reason?"

The tears came to Lucile's eyes again.

"One day last summer," she went on, "Miss Jones and I were walking down Small Street. We were on our way to visit some poor people I—we knew. A lame man, his sick wife and four starving, crying babies were sitting in the sun on a doorstep. They had been turned out of their home and hadn't a place in the world to go! People said their landlady was Miss Granville and when father told me he was going to marry you, I—I——"

"You thought it was I, of course, who had turned the poor family out into the street!" ex-

claimed Mrs. Wentworth. "But, my dear, why didn't you come to me and tell me? It would have been so easy."

Lucile blushed and turned away her head.

"But it wouldn't have been easy," she said. "I was so sure you were the same. And I was afraid Miss Jones would hear your name and know what I knew. I never told any one my real reasons for—for disliking you and let all my friends think me prejudiced and unreasonable and unjust, all of which things I despise," she added, raising her head proudly.

Mrs. Wentworth reached out and gathered the girl into her arms. Lucile clung passionately to her and whispered eagerly:

"Do you—can you forgive me?"

"Forgive you! My dear child, how you must have suffered!" and Mrs. Wentworth bent over and kissed her tenderly on the brow.

Lucile turned to her father timidly. Mr. Wentworth had not spoken. He was incensed at his daughter's hasty jumping at conclusions and so cruelly misjudging the woman whom he loved. He overlooked the fact that Lucile herself had suffered.

But as he looked now into the white, pleading face turned up to him for forgiveness, his anger

left him and his heart was filled with a tender, fatherly love.

"My little girl," he whispered, and taking her face between his two large, gentle hands, he kissed Lucile caressingly.

A long silence fell upon the three. Lucile settled herself comfortably, happily on a low stool between her father's chair and the couch upon which Mrs. Wentworth was lying. At last Mr. Wentworth started up from his reverie.

"Well, well," he exclaimed cheerily. "It is almost dark and we have not settled the business I came upon. You must put your signature to the paper, you know Claire, before the anniversary present is really yours?"

"What a gift it has been," said Mrs. Wentworth softly. "It has cleared away a greater trouble even than my aunt's harsh actions."

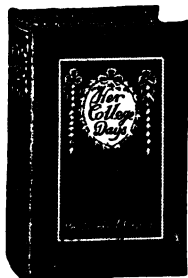
Lucile leaned forward in the dusk and kissed her stepmother gently.

"It has given me the right to love you with all my heart," she whispered.

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